

COLIN WARD is well-known as an authority on housing and as an anarchist propagandist. How do these two themes combine? This book brings together articles and addresses covering thirty years of advocacy of an anarchist approach to housing.

DIRECT ACTION, the first section, includes his now classic account of the post-war squatters' movement and relates it to the current significance of the squatters in Britain and elsewhere.

HUMAN NEEDS identifies the missing component in public housing policies: dweller involvement; and anticipates today's anxieties about the social effects of imposing official policies on people whose own perception of their housing needs has been systematically ignored.

SELF HELP includes accounts of do-it-yourself housing in Britain and abroad, the remarkable achievements of the squatter settlements in the 'cities the poor build' in the Third World. It sketches the outlines of an anarchist approach to the city.

PROFESSIONALS OR PEOPLE? is the question raised in the fourth section of this book. What went wrong with architecture and planning? Can we transform them from being the concern of a bureaucratic elite into a populist and popular activity?

DWELLER CONTROL argues that the only future for public housing, whether in our decaying cities or on new estates, is the tenant take-over.

Colin Ward

# HOUSING

an anarchist  
approach

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*by the same author*

TENANTS TAKE OVER

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ANARCHY IN ACTION

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VIOLENCE

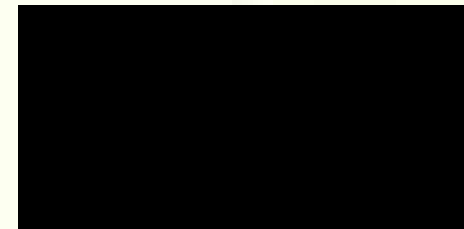
WORK

UTOPIA

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# **Housing: an anarchist approach**

**COLIN WARD**



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## INTRODUCTION

This little book is a collection of articles and lectures of mine over a period of thirty years which attempts to present an anarchist approach to housing. The criticism is often made of anarchist propagandists that they are solely concerned with a blanket criticism of existing society, and with postulating a future "free society", and consequently have nothing sensible or constructive to say about alternative solutions to contemporary problems. When I attempted to refute this view in my book *Anarchy in Action*, consciously trying to show that anarchism has something valid and useful to offer to people looking for interim solutions (which are the only kind of solutions we are likely to see) to the problems of today, one reviewer dismissed it as "trendy leftism" to which I can only reply that I yearn for the day when the left catches up with the anarchists.

Anarchism (the origin of the word is the Greek phrase meaning contrary to authority) seeks a self-organising society: a network of autonomous free associations for the satisfaction of human needs. Inevitably this makes anarchists advocates of social revolution, for the means of satisfying these needs are in the hands of capitalists, bureaucratic, private or governmental monopolies. There is no doubt that Engels was right in seeing the housing problem as a permanent aspect of capitalist society. But it is also a permanent aspect of those societies where the governmental system and the production system are alleged to be socialist, and since people have to be housed, whether they live in a speculator's jungle, a people's democracy, a fascist dictatorship

or an anarchist paradise, there must be some underlying principle for an approach to this universal human need. There is, and it is an anarchist principle, that of *dweller control*, enunciated by my friend John Turner thus:

"When dwellers control the major decisions and are free to make their own contribution to the design, construction or management of their housing, both the process and the environment produced stimulate individual and social well-being. When people have no control over, nor responsibility for key decisions in the housing process, on the other hand, dwelling environments may instead become a barrier to personal fulfilment and a burden on the economy."

It is the same principle of autonomy and responsibility that anarchists apply to industry, education, social welfare and every other sphere of human activity. The anarchist position is at a tangent to the normal political continuum. As Turner says, "The common debate is between the conventional left which condemns capitalism and the conventional right which condemns personal dependency upon state institutions. I agree with both, so nobody committed to either side can agree with me." What the anarchist has to attempt is to change the terms of the debate, to change the way in which people perceive the issue, to suggest a different and libertarian way of stating the problem. The assumption in the kind of welfare capitalist society we live in, is that the magic of the market will satisfy most ordinary human needs, and that government-administered welfare bureaucracies will meet the rest. The ideology of the passive consumer is assumed in both sectors. But the system is collapsing, and people are just beginning to take heed of the alternative solutions which anarchism offers.

In 1948 a young anarchist architect, Giancarlo de Carlo, wrote an article for the Italian anarchist monthly *Volontà*, which I translated for *Freedom* (12 and 26 June, 1948), in which after describing the housing situation in Italy, he remarked that "The situation today is no new phenomenon, but it is worse than ever before, because its effects are more extensive, more dreadful, and, in view of the advances in technique which could be available for us, more absurd. Yet the social organs of today, capitalism and the state, are able to do nothing to resolve this desperate crisis. New materials, new constructional processes are of no avail as long as the principles of privilege and authority prevail." Well, nothing in the experience of his country, or ours, has since invalidated his conclusions. He went on to point

out that capitalism was not building, and was not going to build, houses for the underprivileged classes, because that sort of investment had simply ceased to be profitable, and then he turned to the role of the state:

"The state is the principle of authority—an abstraction masquerading as something real, and can have no real contact with the one concrete reality—man himself—whom it treats and manipulates as though *he* were just an abstraction. The home is an organism in direct relationship to man. It is his external environment, his affirmation in space. Thus the home cannot have any relationship to the state, which recognises man not as individual but as a number, a fraction of some greater number. Every time that the state has taken upon itself these relationships, the results have been disastrous. We could look back into history in order to demonstrate the truth of this, we could describe the city under the ferocious autocratic states of ancient Egypt, of Imperial Rome, of the French monarchy, but it suffices to think of any Italian town today. . . ."

In looking for alternative approaches, he examined building co-operatives, tenants' co-operatives, housing strikes (i.e., rent strikes), and the illegal occupation of empty houses, and finally went on to consider an anarchist attitude to town planning:

"It is possible to adopt a hostile attitude: 'The plan must necessarily emanate from authority, therefore it can only be detrimental. The changes in social life cannot follow the plan—the plan will be a consequence of a new way of life.' Or an attitude of participation could be adopted: 'The plan is the opportunity of liquidating our present social order by changing its direction, and this changed aim is the necessary preliminary for a revolutionary social structure.' The first attitude is based on two main arguments. Firstly, that authority cannot be a liberating agent—perfectly true; secondly, that man can do nothing until he is free—a mistaken view. Man cannot be liberated, he must liberate himself, and any progress towards that liberation can only be the conscious expression of his own will. The investigation of the full extent of the problems of region, city and home, is such an activity. To find out the nature of the problems and to prepare their solution is a concrete example of direct action, taking away the powers of authority and giving them back to men. The attitude of hostility that really means 'waiting for the revolution to do it', does not take into account the fact that the social revolution will be accomplished by clear heads, not by sick and stunted people unable to think of the

future because of the problems of the present. It forgets that the revolution begins in the elimination of these evils so as to create the necessary conditions of a free society."

Giancarlo de Carlo was arguing two important propositions. Firstly that whatever kind of society he lives in, it is important for the anarchist to push forward those approaches to personal and social needs which depend on popular initiative and which postulate alternatives to dependency on capitalism and the state, secondly that "urban planning *can* become a revolutionary weapon if we succeed in rescuing it from the blind monopoly of authority and making it a communal organ of research and investigation into the real problems of social life."

I found his point of view important and helpful, because I had become convinced, and am still, that one of the tasks of the anarchist propagandist is to propagate solutions to contemporary issues which, however dependent they are on the existing social and economic structure, are *anarchist* solutions: the kind of approaches that would be made if we were living in the kind of society we envisage. We are much more likely to win support for our point of view, in other words, if we put forward anarchist answers which can be tried out here and now, than if we declare that there are no answers until the ultimate answer: a social revolution which continually disappears over the horizon.

Another of his readers was John Turner, then a student at the Architectural Association School of Architecture, who had been seduced from the army through reading *Freedom*. He, as a schoolboy, had been given as an imposition the task of doing a précis of a chapter from Lewis Mumford's *The Culture of Cities*, a chapter which introduced him to the philosophy of town and regional planning of Patrick Geddes, whose biographer Philip Mairet remarks that "an interesting book could be written about the scientific origins of the international anarchist movement, and if it were, the name of Geddes would not be absent". Personally I doubt if the anarchist movement can be said to have its origins in science, and I think Mairet was referring to the exchange of ideas between Geddes and anarchist thinkers like Peter Kropotkin and Elisée Reclus, but certainly if we are thinking about a popular and participatory approach to housing and planning, Geddes was a neglected prophet. Turner contributed to the post-war edition of his book *Cities in Evolution*, a book which epitomises the approach to urban planning espoused by de Carlo: it is really a treatise on the environmental self-education of the ordinary citizen.

In 1952 I made my first (and I fear, only) visit to Italy, to visit some of the anarchist propagandists, Cesare Zaccaria, Giovanni Berneri and Ugo Fedeli. In Milan I met Giancarlo de Carlo and followed him to Venice, where by chance, he was addressing a group of architectural students which included John Turner, Pat Crooke and others from the AA School. The occasion has stayed in my mind simply because, in retrospect, we discussed the very issues that have preoccupied us ever since: how to change the way in which housing and planning issues are perceived, how to shift the initiative in planning from the bureaucrat to the citizen, how to shift that in housing from passive consumption to active involvement.

Two decades have passed in which the architectural, planning and housing establishments have ignored these matters. The policies they have followed have been discredited and alternatives are in the air. We ourselves are older and perhaps wiser, but can claim to have been faithful after our fashion, to the ideas that we thought important years ago. Giancarlo de Carlo has made important contributions to architecture and planning, and in his recent articles, *Legitimising Architecture* (Amsterdam 1972) and *An Architecture of Participation* (Melbourne 1972) reinforces the arguments he was using over a quarter of a century ago in the anarchist press. John Turner and Pat Crooke, now regarded as world authorities in the field of housing in the "developing countries", have returned to Britain to share their wisdom with a new generation of radical students. I find myself continually embarrassed (since all I have to offer are a few simple truths) by requests to address meetings of tenants and of housing managers, councillors and academics. While it is gratifying for us to have our ideas taken seriously, it is also humbling, because of the enormous gap between having the right ideas and putting them into effect.

My book *Tenants Take Over* was intended as an incitement to action in one particular direction: to change the relationship of landlords and tenants in the municipal third of housing in Britain, by transferring control from local authorities to tenants' co-operatives. This collection is an attempt to put the issue in a wider context.

The reader will find repetitions and inconsistencies in this collection, for which I apologise in advance. I make no apology for the fact that he will find no anarchist plan for housing the community and no description of housing in an anarchist society.

What he will find is an anarchist perspective on the housing scene in Britain over the last thirty years, addressed for the most part to a non-anarchist readership. But if we ask ourselves how anarchists would approach the provision of housing, some of the answers can be glimpsed in these pages.

Most of the material in this book has been previously published in various journals or has been delivered at meetings and conferences. My acknowledgements are due to those audiences and to the editors of the following journals: *Anarchy*, *The Architects' Journal*, *Freedom*, *Housing Review*, *Inside Story*, *Peace News*, *RIBA Journal*, *Times Educational Supplement*, *Times Literary Supplement*, *Town and Country Planning*, *Twentieth Century*, *Undercurrents*, *War Commentary*.

## I. Direct Action

### DIRECT ACTION FOR HOUSES

A little while ago *War Commentary* reported the arrest of seven families who had settled in an empty 20-room mansion and a cottage at Blantyre. However the case ended, it was, as this paper pointed out, "an indication of the kind of incident which is likely to become frequent during the aggravated housing shortage after the war". And now we read reports of the activities in Brighton of the "Ex-servicemen's Secret Committee", whose Vigilantes so far number over 400 members. Working at night, they break into unoccupied houses and instal the homeless families of servicemen, with their belongings and household goods. At their open-air meeting on Sunday, 9 July, the movement's secretary described how they had received enquiries from London, Portsmouth, Sheffield, Liverpool and other parts of Britain, and added: "I have told them, 'If you see a house, take it and let the law do its damndest'. We have started a movement which we hope and pray will spread over the length and breadth of the land." Delegates of the Brighton movement have now visited London to attend a secret conference with the object of developing a similar organisation there.

The Brighton ex-servicemen evidently do not intend to be fooled again by the "Homes for Heroes" patter of the politicians. They know that houses will only be provided as the result of their own militant action, and not through petitions, recommendations or ballot-paper crosses.

We often hear of the housing achievements of the Vienna

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From *War Commentary—for Anarchism*, 28 July, 1945.

Municipality in the 1920s, but we are never told the story of the determined action of the workers themselves which forced the authorities to provide houses. After the First World War, Austria was suffering the results of military defeat, blockade, famine and inflation, but her most desperate problem was overcrowding. In March 1921, 200,000 people silently demonstrated outside the Rathaus in Vienna carrying banners with the words "Give us Land, Wood and Stone, and we will make Bread!" But the Viennese workers knew that a demonstration by itself would accomplish nothing. The returning wounded soldiers didn't wait for houses to be built for them—they demanded that the government should hand over to them part of the ex-Emperor's Hunting Park. The government refused time after time to consider their demand, so the ex-soldiers took a cartload of picks and shovels to the Lainzer Tiergarten and "dug themselves in". They went on to build foundations, till the government was forced to recognise their *fait accompli* and the "Kriegsinvaliden" settlement was begun.

The workers of Hirschstetten appropriated bricks from an old fortress, and again in the industrial quarter beyond the Danube the transport workers and others coerced the authorities into action by first taking the initiative themselves. They began work on the houses, and the government *afterwards* legalised the affair by leasing the land. In the same way the postal workers and many more, by their own action, *forced* the government to initiate the Vienna Municipal Housing and Town Planning Scheme.

An English instance of working class expropriation during the same period is given in George Woodcock's wartime Freedom Press pamphlet *Homes or Hovels*:

"One example was that of a camp of huts which had been built in Durham during the 1914-1918 war to accommodate Belgian refugees. There were about 650 concrete huts with drainage, water, electricity, roads, a school and a hospital. The whole place was surrounded by heavy park railings with locked gates. At the end of the war the refugees returned home, the camp was deserted and locked up. Meanwhile, the housing shortage on Tyneside had become acute, and one night the gates of the camp were broken down and a number of working class families established themselves in the huts. The number soon increased, and before the authorities awoke sufficiently to take action a large settlement was already in being. The government, realising that some considerable measure of force would be necessary to eject the new dwellers, gave in and accepted the situation."

Another more publicised incident was the "Blitz Hotel" incident of a few years ago in Glasgow, where families of squatters in a war-damaged building refused to leave until alternative accommodation had been provided for them.

Sir John Orr in a recent speech showed that many social evils like high infant mortality rates, high general death rates, crime rate, juvenile delinquency, tuberculosis, etc., can be directly related to malnutrition and bad housing. We don't need to be reminded of how food was systematically destroyed to keep prices up, while millions went hungry, but it is not widely realised that in the same way, the housing shortage is not a question of productivity—the land, materials and workers exist—but is an economic question. A society based on profits and dividends will not provide homes at rents which working class folk can afford, *because it doesn't pay*:

"Though more than one-third of all houses in England and Wales were built since 1918, more than three-quarters of all houses of low value in 1938 had been erected before 1914, and they provided the houses of perhaps eight in every ten working class families."—*The Times*, 3 Feb., 1945.

It should also be pointed out that, of these houses one-third were actually built before 1861, and that the figures do not include Scotland whose housing standards are lower still. This is the lesson of the past, and it will be repeated in the future unless the workers act. If the lavish promises of the politicians are fulfilled, they will only succeed in housing the highest-paid workers and the lower middle class, while the ordinary working class family can only hope for the older and obsolete houses from which more fortunate people have moved, when they become new slum areas and rents are lower through deterioration and sub-division. But while the workers should not be deluded by the idea that they can get adequate, healthy and pleasant homes without the destruction of the capitalist system, they should study the day-to-day possibilities of action for the lowering of rents and the prevention of rent increases.

Remember the Glasgow Rent Strikers of the First World War period. All over the city, when rent increases were made, the housewives banded together street by street, refusing to pay, and forming the Women's Housing Council. They spied on the movements of bailiffs and rent-collectors, barricaded their homes, put the furniture of evicted people back into the houses as soon as it was pitched out, and even had actual fights with the factors.

The men came out from the big shipyards and works and the government, finding that their promises of inquiries and legislation did not satisfy the workers, or prevent more men from stopping work, were forced to pass the first Rent Restrictions Act, while the landlords had to withdraw the increases. As one of the workers' delegates said, "The country can't do without the 8,000 workers, but the country can do without the factors". The Glasgow Rent Strike was important as a tendency towards the social and political strike, one of the most potent of our weapons against our rulers. The Glasgow workers knew that they could not rely for support on the official Trade Union and Labour leaders. (I expect they remembered the words of Robert Smillie, MP, years before, when he said to a woman who was trying to prevent the Sheriff's Officer from turning her out, "I'd advise you to get out of the way and let the man do his work. You can do no good.") The workers' task now, just as it was in 1915 is, as John Maclean said then, "to take the initiative into their own hands".

The second great Rent Strike Movement grew from London in the years just before the Second World War. In 1938, 250 tenants at Quinn Square, Bethnal Green, started a strike to demand not only the repayment of money charged above the limits of the Rent Restrictions Act, but a general reduction of rents in future. They succeeded and were followed by a strike of 131 tenants of Southern Grove, Mile End, who picketted, barricaded and demonstrated to get repairs done and rents lowered. They too were successful and shortly afterwards workers living in three London areas, Holborn, Stepney and Poplar, whose flats all belonged to the same landlord, struck:

"900 tenants secured a victory and signed an agreement which established a flat rate for every type of dwelling and provided for adequate repairs and redecorations to all flats to be started immediately and carried out periodically."—*Reynolds News*, 16 April, 1939.

The Stepney tenants conducted the Langdale Mansions strike and the "Great Brady Street Battle", as well as many others. The 340 Brady Street tenants barricaded their homes and fought the landlords for 21 weeks, after which they won big rent reductions, the return of evicted tenants and an agreement by the landlords to carry out the necessary repairs to the extent of £2,500 for the first year and £1,500 for each year afterwards. Rent strikes also occurred at Amersham, Balham, Bellingham, Dagenham, Hammersmith, Hampstead, Hendon, Holborn, Maldon,

Woolwich, Wood Green and many other places in and around London.

In the Municipal tenants' strike at Birmingham, 40,000 people fought for 19 weeks to prevent rent increases, and 15,000 of them got reductions totalling £30,000 a year. The continued success of the rent strikes and their rapid spreading, frightened landlords everywhere into doing repairs, and some even offered to reduce rents, while the government at the beginning of the War passed the further Rent Restrictions Act (although this has been widely ignored or evaded by landlords).

There has been much less of a struggle against the burden of rates, although as Sir E. D. Simon says (quoting the case of a man trying to move out of a slum area into a new housing estate, and finding that besides having to pay, say, 5s. more a week in rent, he has also an additional 4s. in rates), "Surely no other tax existing in this country even approaches in harshness and injustice this tax on a poor father of a large family, of 10% of his income for rates alone, levied just because he is making special sacrifices to bring up his children in good conditions." He points out that "a rich man living in a large house will often not pay as much as 1% of his income in rates." Certainly few taxes are so blatantly designed to make both the poor poorer and the rich richer.

Councillor A. B. Mackay of Glasgow explains how our rating system benefits the landlords: "The landlord class has unbridled control of legislation for centuries and they abused their power, legislating in their own class interests, shifting the obligations which lay on their lands on to tax- and rate-payers, while they continued to take the ever-increasing value resulting from the energy and expenditure of the community. The device by which the landlords effect their depredations is very simple but very effective. Where their lands are unused, or used for a purpose of lower utility than the optimum, they are returned in the rating books at a nominal amount or a low valuation. They, the landlords, are all right. The fools—the rate-payers on full land, building and improvement value—will do the paying while the landlord waits till a public body or a private person will pay up the inflated price which scarcity of land provides."

The middle-class ratepayers' associations show on which side of the fence they stand when they continually call for a reduction of rates to be made possible by cutting down those social services from which the working class benefits. They do not demand

a proper rating of their friends the landlords.

A quite unique form of Rate Strike was that made by George Lansbury's Poplar Borough Council in the early 1920s when they refused to levy the LCC's Poor Rate because it imposed an indefensible burden on the working class boroughs to the exclusion of the wealthy ones. Once Lansbury and his council had been jailed, it was found that because they wouldn't alter their view, they would have to stay in prison indefinitely. The only way by which the authorities could solve the absurd situation was by changing the law. There have been sporadic rates strikes since among the workers, but never to the extent of the rent strikes.

From the examples mentioned above, we can see how effective direct action can be when applied to our housing problems. It works, it gets results. Already the Brighton Corporation has promised to requisition houses officially for its homeless people. But it wouldn't have even come limping along behind in this matter but for the action of the Vigilantes. Our message to them should be:

Act on your own—no reliance on the politicians, especially those who try to cash in on your success.

Stick together, and work on as big a scale as possible.

Don't give up, and don't give a damn for the authorities.

If the Vigilantes have these three prerequisites for successful action: *independence, solidarity and determination*, we can be sure that their movement will "spread over the length and breadth of the land", and may have consequences and give opportunities which it would be criminal for the workers to ignore.

## THE PEOPLE ACT:

## THE POSTWAR SQUATTERS' MOVEMENT

*"In the last few weeks there has been organised squatting in empty mansions, with enough public approval to force the government and the authorities into more active requisitioning—a score for the anarchists . . ."*

F. J. OSBORN, 26 July, 1945.

The politicians of the post-war Labour government, who were taken by surprise by the squatters' movement which swept Britain (and other countries) in 1946, showed, by their astonishment and unpreparedness, how far out of touch they were with the desperation of the housing situation, and with the mood of the people. They were blind to the evidence provided by the earlier seizures of empty buildings by homeless returning servicemen which occurred in 1919, or by the Scottish examples during the 1939-1945 war—the "Blitz Hotel" incident in Glasgow, and the occupation of empty houses at Blantyre in the spring of 1945. Above all, they ignored the lessons of the Vigilante campaign of the summer of 1945—that far-off summer which saw the beginning of the "peace" and of the atomic age.

Compiled from my reports on the squatters' campaign from *Freedom*, 27 July, 10 Aug., 24 Aug., 7 Sept., 21 Sept., 5 Oct. and 19 Oct., 1946. Printed in this form in *Anarchy*, January 1963. Reprinted by the London Squatters in 1969. The quotation at the top is new, and comes from *The Letters of Lewis Mumford and Frederic J. Osborn*, ed. by Michael Hughes (London and Dart 1971).

The picturesque, but perhaps ill-advised name of "Vigilantes" was adopted by committees of, largely, ex-servicemen who, under cover of night, installed homeless families and their furniture in unoccupied houses—usually successfully, since no action could be taken to evict them once they were in, until the usually absentee property-owners could initiate legal proceedings against them. This campaign started, and was most active, in seaside towns, for example Southend, Hastings and, most of all, Brighton, which has a rather unique place among the South Coast resorts in that it has a large working-class population. The original and outstanding grievance against which the Vigilante campaign was aimed, was the way in which big seaside houses were being kept empty for most of the year in order to be let at very high rents during the short holiday season.

From this, as the movement spread, it became an attack on the right of landlords to keep property unoccupied for any reason. The success of the Vigilantes forced the government to grant wider powers to local authorities to requisition property for housing purposes, while the threat of further direct action ensured that the councils would use these powers. Thus the campaign began with the effort to put right an obvious public scandal, it spread to become a challenge of the hitherto hardly disputed right of the landlord to do as he liked with his own property without reference to public needs, and it ended with the official sanction of this challenge.

The squatters' movement of the following year sprang from another of these scandalous anomalies—the emptiness of hundreds of army and air force camps during the worst housing shortage we have known. The first of the 1946 squatters was Mr. James Fielding, a cinema projectionist at Scunthorpe, Lincolnshire, who, desperate for somewhere to live, moved on May 8 with his family, into the former officers' mess of an unoccupied anti-aircraft camp. As soon as the news of their action got around the town, other young couples in a similar predicament moved into the other huts, and the first colony of squatters was born. Shortly after this two other camps in the same area were seized, and this was followed by the occupation of several camps around Sheffield. The Sheffield settlers formed a Squatters' Protection Society and quickly linked up with the pioneer squatters at Scunthorpe.

These events were rapidly followed by the seizure of hundreds of camps everywhere in Britain. The authorities who at first disclaimed any responsibility for the squatters—passing the buck

from one department to another—were forced into recognising the occupations, and local authorities were instructed to turn on water and electricity and to provide essential services. Later in the year the Ministry of Works, which had previously declared itself "not interested", found it possible to offer the Ministry of Health (which was then the government department responsible for housing) 850 former service camps.

The government announced on 11 October, 1946 that 1,038 camps in England and Wales had been occupied by 39,535 people, and on 5 September it was stated that four thousand people had squatted in Scotland. Since the government could not destroy the movement, it tried to absorb it, and expressed itself confident that the settlers would "see reason" and "move out when the situation had been explained to them". A leading article in *The Observer* commented: "The Ministry piously hopes that squatters, after certain explanations, will 'return to the homes from which they have come'. What homes? Bits of caravans or crannies in the overcrowded lodgings or the premises of others from which they are desperately trying to escape? The fact that ex-soldiers who have had plenty of camp life in their time should now regard an army hut as a little bit of heaven is surely strong enough evidence of their misery and despair. Nor are they likely to be terrified by the talk of winter weather."

As the camps began to fill, the squatters turned to other empty buildings: houses, shops, mansions, disused school buildings, race tracks and a stadium, were among the places occupied, and on August 26, two Aberdeen hotels and a hostel were taken, while on the 29th two big hotels in Glasgow were seized, though they had to be abandoned later.

The final and most spectacular phase of the campaign began in London on Sunday, 8 September, when the 148 luxury flats of Duchess of Bedford House, Kensington, another block in Weymouth Street, Marylebone, and houses in Holland Park and Camden Hill were invaded. On the following day three more houses in Beaumont Street, Marylebone were taken over, and on Tuesday 60 families entered Fountain Court, a block of flats in Victoria. On Wednesday the flats at Abbey Lodge, Regents Park and the 630-room Ivanhoe Hotel, Bloomsbury, were occupied.

The tactics adopted by the police in this final stage of the campaign varied from day to day. At first at the Duchess of Bedford House their human sympathy seems to have got the better of their role as protectors of the interests of the propertied

classes, and, according to the press, "Police called to the scene made themselves helpful and an Inspector made arrangements for a WVS van to supply hot drinks." But on the Tuesday they were organising a watch on unoccupied property to prevent further squatting, and the Home Office instructed Scotland Yard to "enquire into the origin of the organisation behind the squatters" and to keep the government "fully informed of the activities of political agitators who foment trouble". (Needless to say, the CID soon announced "secret documents".) On the Wednesday, after Abbey Lodge and the Ivanhoe Hotel had been seized, the police cordoned the buildings. Their refusal to allow any more than twenty-five blankets into Abbey Lodge for the children, caused a scene outside in which demonstrators lay down five deep in the road and held up traffic for a quarter of a mile. Later, food and blankets were allowed in.

There were similar scenes at the Ivanhoe Hotel. The state of siege was resumed during the night at the four main "squatters' fronts" and the blockade continued on the following day, while the police took more action to prevent people from entering or re-entering the buildings. The same scenes were repeated on the Thursday night, and mounted police were used to disperse the crowd at Abbey Lodge. On Friday there were rumours that they intended to use tear gas. Police leave was stopped, and the route to the Sunday meeting in Hyde Park was lined with mounted police. The first arrests, apart from the usual ones on charges of obstruction and insulting behaviour, were made on the Saturday, when five Communists were charged with "conspiring together with other persons to incite people to trespass on property". (They were subsequently found guilty and bound over.)

On the same day, the Minister of Health, the late Aneurin Bevan, who was just back from his holiday in Switzerland, instructed all local authorities to cut off gas and electricity supplies to all property under their control occupied by squatters. The Labour government advised all owners of empty buildings to ensure that all doors and windows were secured, but it did not ask them why, at a time when families were being prosecuted for sleeping in fields and ditches, their property remained empty.

The Communists, although they had a year earlier denounced the Vigilantes, were very active amongst the squatters in London. So much so that people who had to rely on newspapers for their information assumed, and have assumed since, that the whole thing was a Communist stunt. Diana Murray Hill, the only person

to make a serious study at the time, of who the squatters were, and what kind of straits they had been in (*Pilot Papers*, November 1946), reported from Abbey Lodge that "as to the argument that the Communists gave them the idea of squatting, they said there was nothing to it. Many of them had been squatting of their own accord before the taking over of the flats. In some cases the huts they had been squatting in had been taken away from them". And, "finally the crowd of sympathisers outside, the majority of whom Mr. R. knew personally and could vouch for their not being Communists . . .". And of the squatters themselves: "Again he knew many of them personally, and of the ones he knew none were Communists. The squatters formed their own committee". Or as we put it in *Freedom* (21 Sept., 1946):

"The fact is that the Communists wish to exploit the movement now that it has become widespread. One must recognise this fact even when one expresses sympathy with the arrested leaders, and solidarity with those rank and file Communists who have given genuine support to some squatters. Nevertheless the support of the Communists is a real danger to the movement. Legal action against the squatters was obviously very difficult; but the attempt of the CP to organise them has provided the government with just the handle they needed. The legal prosecutions will deflect attention from the real issue—the desperate plight of the homeless. It will lower the whole question to the level of political strife and opportunism. Perhaps most dangerous of all, the CP themselves will seek to turn the movement into legalistic channels. They have already formulated 'demands' of the government. Soon they will be urging the homeless to avoid further direct action and to 'do nothing to hamper the realisation of your demands'."

The truth of this evaluation was shown in the anti-climax of the "general evacuation" by the London squatters when the High Court injunction was granted. This was treated by the press as the end of the squatters, and the fact was concealed that the many thousands of camp settlers were not affected by the set-back, and had settled down until they could find something better, while many of the London squatters were eventually provided with accommodation of one sort or another by the LCC.

In October, Aneurin Bevan sought to turn public feeling against the camp squatters by suggesting that they were "jumping their place in the housing queue", when in fact they were jumping out of the housing queue by moving into buildings which would not otherwise have been used for housing purposes. It took most of

them years in fact to get into the "housing queue". Over a hundred families who in 1946 occupied a camp known as Field Farm in Oxfordshire, stayed together and in 1958-9 were rehoused in the new village of Berinsfield on the same site.

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A notable feature of the whole campaign was the way in which, quite spontaneously and without disputes, the accommodation was divided among the would-be squatters in accordance with their needs, the size of their families, and so on. The best huts and buildings, usually the former Officers' Mess, needless to say, went to large families, while the ordinary Nissen huts were divided among the childless couples. Of one of the earliest squatters' camps it was reported on 24 July, 1946, "The campers today discovered a 20,000-gallon water tank and have turned on the water. A youth appointed as water inspector, is carrying out hourly checks to ensure that taps are not left running. A camp committee has been elected and the camp is being run on communal lines. Tradesmen call with their vans."

In camps I visited in Hampshire I found everywhere that hopeful, adventurous spirit that springs from independence and spontaneous co-operation. Everywhere I saw attempts to make those bleak huts look "more like home". Communal cooking, laundering and nursery facilities sprang up. Fathers took turns to stoke the boilers, mothers took turns to do the settlement's shopping, and the children collected up the rubbish left by the army and made bonfires of it. For them at least, it was a real adventure. Squatters Protection Societies and Federations were formed to protect their mutual interest. Some memorable scenes of solidarity were seen during the seizures at London hotels, when, in the face of police opposition, complete strangers threw into the buildings blankets and parcels of food, without hope of recompense.

One of the remarkable features of the squatters' communities was that they were formed of people who had very little in common except their homelessness—tinkers and university dons were amongst them. A very revealing report on the squatters, in a series "How Are They Now?" appeared in the *News Chronicle* for January 14, 1947. The correspondent describes a camp in Lancashire:

"... There are two camps within the camp—the official squatters (that is, people who have been placed in the huts after the first invasion) and the unofficial squatters (the veterans who have been allowed to remain on sufferance). Both pay the same rent of

10s. a week—but there the similarity ends. Although one would have imagined that the acceptance of rent from both should accord them identical privileges, in fact it does not. Workmen have put up partitions in the huts of the official squatters—and have put in sinks and numerous other conveniences. These are the sheep; the goats have perforce to fend for themselves.

"An interesting commentary on the situation was made by one of the young welfare officers attached to the housing department. On her visit of inspection she found that the goats had set to work with a will, improvising partitions, running up curtains, distemping, painting and using initiative. The official squatters on the other hand, sat about glumly without using initiative or lifting a hand to help themselves and bemoaning their fate, even though they might have been removed from the most appalling slum property. Until the overworked corporation workmen got around to them they would not attempt to improve affairs themselves."

How much this story reveals, not only about the squatters, but about the difference between the state of mind that induces free independent action, and that of dependence and inertia; the difference between people who initiate things and act for themselves, and the people to whom things just happen.

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When the squatters movement is viewed against other historical examples of direct action applied to the housing problem in a non-revolutionary situation, four definite phases, common to them all, can be discerned. Firstly *Initiative*, the individual action that begins the campaign, the spark that starts the blaze; secondly *Consolidation*, when the movement spreads sufficiently to constitute a real threat to property rights and becomes big enough to avoid being simply snuffed out by the authorities. The third phase is that of *Success*, when the authorities have to concede to the movement what it has won; and the fourth phase is that of *Official Action*, usually undertaken unwillingly in order to placate the popular demand, and to avoid further attacks on the interests of the propertied class. For nothing succeeds like success, and governments usually realise that, as Kropotkin observes, "Once the principle of the 'Divine Right of Property' is shaken, no amount of theorising will prevent its overthrow."

The first phase was seen in Glasgow in 1915 when the Govan housewives refused to pay the rent increases demanded by rapacious landlords, while Partick women rough-handled the rent-

collectors; it was seen in Vienna in 1921 when homeless ex-soldiers seized land in the ex-Emperor's hunting park, and began to build houses; it was to be seen again in 1938 when 250 tenants of Quinn Square, Bethnal Green refused to pay any more rent until repairs were done and rents reduced; it was seen in Brighton in June 1945, when ex-servicemen moved a homeless family into a house in Round Hill Street, and thus began the Vigilante campaign; and it was seen in May 1946, when the Fielding family initiated the Squatters by settling in the Scunthorpe camp.

The second phase was represented by the great demonstration of housewives in George Square during the Clydeside Rent Strikes, and the strike of the shipyard workers who passed a resolution that "unless the government took action to reduce rents to their pre-war level, a general strike on the Clyde would follow". In Vienna it was the formation of the Land Settlement Movement, whose banners were inscribed with the words: "Give us Land, Wood and Stone, and we will make Bread!" In the London Rent Strike Movement, this phase was apparent in the development of the Stepney Tenants' League and the spread of rent strikes all over the London area; in the Vigilante campaign it took the form of widespread occupation of empty apartments, and among the squatters it was still more noticeable in the seizure of service camps in every part of the country.

The third phase was implicit in the Glasgow Sheriff Court's decision in favour of eighteen workers summoned for non-payment of rent, after a deputation had pointed out to the Sheriff that "These men will only resume work in the event of your deciding against the factor: if you do not, it means that the workers on the lower reaches will stop work tomorrow and join them." It was seen in the Vienna Municipality's recognition of the Co-operative Building Clubs; and it took a very obvious form in the rent strikes before the last war when the landlord of Brady Street, Stepney, had to agree to big rent reduction, and to large-scale repairs. The official sanctioning of the first wave of camp squatters was the latest example of this phase.

In the final phase we see the complete justification of direct action as a means of forcing the authorities to take radical measures that they would not otherwise have considered. Fearing further big strikes on the Clyde in the First World War, a government completely representing the landlord class, was forced to pass the first Rent Restrictions Act, and, remembering this, and with the 1938-9 rent strikes fresh in mind, Chamberlain's govern-

ment hastened to introduce the 1939 Rent Restrictions Act on the outbreak of the Second World War. The militant action of the Austrian workers made it necessary for the authorities, at a time of complete economic and financial collapse, to initiate the Vienna Municipal Housing and Town-Planning Scheme, one of the biggest and most comprehensive in Europe. In 1945 the Vigilantes coerced the government into granting local authorities wide requisitioning powers and the threat of further action made sure that they used them. In the same way the announcement that "Eight hundred and fifty former service camps are being offered by the Ministry of Works to Mr. Aneurin Bevan to help him in his emergency housing drive", was the measure of the success of the camp squatters. But for the opportunist intervention of the Communists, it seems likely that the seizure of hotels and luxury flats would have forced even more significant and spectacular concessions from the authorities.

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Today, direct action is again overdue. Isn't it extraordinary that in a period when homelessness in London has been building up steadily, State House in Holborn, one of the vast new prestige office blocks should have stood empty for at least two years? In the new Solidarity pamphlet *Homelessness*, Sheila Jones of the Tenants' Association at one of the LCC's "half-way houses" says, "To some of us it is beginning to be clear that if we want anything done we will have to do it ourselves. The LCC tries to keep these places as terrible as possible to prevent others taking advantage of the 'facilities' provided. An imaginative and selective breaking of the artificial LCC rules might be an effective method of protest. What would happen for instance if a group of families got together and decided to bring in their own furniture to replace the LCC stuff? Would the LCC wardens call the police in . . . against tenants whose only crime was that they had tried, at their own expense, to make living conditions more bearable for themselves and for their children?"

And another contributor, Ken Jones, points out that there are possibilities for the unfortunate occupants of the reception centres who have literally nothing to lose. He suggests for example that husbands should disobey the "curfew" so that if the authorities dare, they must use force to separate a man from his family.

But must the homeless and dispirited be left to fight their own battles?

## WHAT HAVE THE SQUATTERS ACHIEVED?

There is a journal, not widely read among left-wing activists, the *Times Literary Supplement*, which is however, universally read among librarians and presumably influences their choice of what books to buy. As a lifelong user of the public libraries, I find this important. The only time I was ever asked to review a book for that journal was a couple of years ago, and the book was Ron Bailey's Penguin Special *The Squatters*. Obviously in such circumstances of brevity, anonymity and for that audience, I would stress what I regard as the most significant things about the squatters' campaign. What I wrote (and incidentally, the editor cut out everything derogatory to Redbridge Council) was:

"Commissioned in 1969, when the affair of the Redbridge squatters filled the headlines, this book was delayed for years, firstly pending the result of a lawsuit arising from the activities of Redbridge Council's 'bailiffs' and subsequently through the need to include an account of the struggle to gain acceptance of the squatters' movement in another London borough. In its final form it suffers from the publishers' determination to cut Mr. Bailey down to size, so that his conclusions on the theory and practice of direct action have been omitted. This is infinitely regrettable since the ideological issues raised by the squatters' movement are burning questions today in every field of social policy and social action: in the crisis of conscience among social workers, in the deepening malaise of urban education, in the emergence of community action groups and claimants' unions, and in the whole new style of local political

Contribution to a symposium on Alternative Realities, May 1975.

activism (independent of the party machines of both left and right) which has grown up as a result of the failure of the organised system to cope with the actual human needs of its clients.

"Mr. Bailey, who was the author of Shelter's recent *Grief Report* documenting the failure of local authorities to comply with their statutory duty to the homeless, was one of a handful of activists concerned in the mid-sixties with drawing public attention to conditions at the King Hill hostel for the homeless in Kent, and after a long and bitter campaign, with obliging the County Council to change its policy. From this, they moved to a short and unsuccessful campaign against Essex County Council over its hostel at Abridge, and to a battle with the GLC over conditions at the Coventry Cross flats at Bromley-by-Bow. By this time 'a squatting campaign was clearly on the cards; it only needed a spark to set it off', and with the experience of these instances of successful direct action behind them, they moved to the symbolic occupation of empty property in East London boroughs, and then to a direct challenge to a local authority by settling homeless families in unoccupied houses which had been earmarked for demolition years hence for eventual road improvements, car parking or municipal offices.

"This outraged the corporation which reacted in the style of the worst tradition of authoritarian municipal bumbledom. The use of 'private investigators' as agents of the council to terrorise and intimidate the squatting families, widely reported in the press and on television, drew public opinion to the support of the squatters, as did the policy of deliberately wrecking the interiors of empty houses just to keep the squatters out. Mr. Bailey describes in blow-by-blow detail the events in Redbridge, and the subsequent activities of the squatters' movement in Wandsworth, Fulham, Brighton and Tower Hamlets, the story culminating in the official recognition of the Lewisham Family Squatters Association, and the struggle for acceptance in the London Borough of Southwark. (These are not parochial matters: the repercussions of the campaign have been felt in many other cities and countries.)

"The book is useful as a legal handbook for squatters, since Mr. Bailey has had to study their complicated legal situation in great depth. One aspect of the campaign worth noting is that while he and his associates went to great lengths (for the sake of the families they were helping) to act within the provisions of the law, several of the councils had no such scruples. He shows himself to be very conscious of the responsibilities the

activists had shouldered in helping dispirited homeless families in this way. They were in fact walking on a tightrope. On the one side were 'respectable' pressure groups like Shelter whose director was at first critical of the campaign because it might alienate the general public, in just the same way as Mr. Bailey is critical of those 'helpers' who developed an unproductive siege mentality in the buildings they occupied, and of the 'hippy' squatters at 144 Piccadilly who 'were a factor which tended to hinder the development of a mass squatting campaign among the working class'. As time goes by, and as the urban housing crisis deepens, it becomes difficult to distinguish between the two categories of squatter, except in the attitudes of the well-housed public, whose conscience is touched by one category and whose hostility is aroused by the other.

"Western society has deprived its poor of the opportunity to house themselves (the comparison with Third World countries is made in another recent book *Freedom to Build*, ed. Turner and Fichter, Macmillan, New York, 1972) while its housing bureaucracy acts against the interests of its poorest citizens (as is documented in *Snap* 69/72, a report of the Liverpool Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project). In these circumstances the squatters' movement acts as a kind of Gandhian moral blackmail before the court of public opinion, to enforce the collaboration of the bureaucracy in handing over short-term accommodation to the homeless. And like Gandhi's campaigns its effect in pressing for change in social priorities is more significant than the number of people who are directly benefited. But it is also a harbinger of a new style of social and political activity that changes demoralised and helpless people from being the *objects* of social policy to becoming active fighters in their own cause. This was apparent in the squatting campaign at the end of the Second World War, it was obvious in the King Hill Hostel agitation, and it emerges very clearly from Mr. Bailey's absorbing contribution to contemporary social history."

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These words were written for an indifferent or hostile readership, but they express what I felt and feel about the significance of the squatters' movement and Ron Bailey's contribution to it. The omitted chapter of his book, "In Defence of Direct Action" was finally published as a supplement to *Wildcat* No. 3, November 1974. Here he defends himself firstly against those who oppose direct action from a constitutional point of view, and secondly

against his critics on the allegedly revolutionary left. He remarks that:

"In the squatters movement I have worked with ordinary non-political people for admittedly small gains, and we achieved a large measure of success. Ordinary people acted and won; and ordinary people manage the houses in which they now live. So when councils offered to hand over houses we accepted these rather than fight over them unnecessarily. And I make no apology for this, for a number of reasons: first it achieved the immediate aim of the squatters, a decent place in which to live, and, secondly, it achieved more—additional houses were handed over to the squatters. What do those who claim that these deals were a sell-out suggest we should have done? Should we have refused to accept the houses and so leave them empty? Or perhaps we should have insisted that the squatting in them remained unlawful so that a confrontation could occur?"

Bailey believes that the squatters' movement "demonstrates daily the message that badly housed people are capable of organising their own lives. That is the kind of message that revolutionaries should be seeking to get across day after day and month after month." I think he is right, and I am not one of those critics of Ron Bailey and Jim Radford who regard them as renegades for having entered into deals with local authorities or for taking jobs in this field with voluntary organisations. (I would hardly criticise them on this score anyway, since I work for a voluntary organisation myself; in Kropotkin's interpretation of anarchism they have an indispensable function.) I think we owe a great deal to those two and their handful of associates for finding the right time and place and setting in motion an activity which has spread far beyond their influence and far, indeed, beyond this country.

In Europe the squatters' movement has taken a variety of forms. It has been, as in Turin, an aspect of bitterly fought working-class struggle, as in Berlin, a battle against redevelopment for the well-off, as in Amsterdam, a manifestation of the counter-culture. In Copenhagen, there is a 50-acre site in the district called Christianshavn, occupied as an army barracks until October 1971, when after the army moved out, the squatters moved in. The magazine *Danish Journal* (published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in its issue No. 76 in 1973, reported that:

"Previous cases of squatting after the vacating of old property had provided the municipality with some bitter experience and

so a new procedure had been introduced. As soon as the tenants of a condemned building moved out, the bulldozers moved in. But this time they were too late. A motley crowd of several hundred people, of all ages, occupied the abandoned area and proclaimed it a 'free city'. The new occupants defended their territory aggressively and both the municipality and the government were loath to apply force. The place was renamed Christiania. The 'free city' was a reality."

This report declared that many of the 700 inhabitants of the 'free city' feel that the 'leaders' in their attempts to meet the demands for the payment of rent, electricity and water charges "have actually begun to connive with the arch-enemy, established society". It also says that while about 200 of the inhabitants have ordinary jobs, ranging from unskilled workers to academics, while a similar proportion "can be classified as social dropouts, many of them severely addicted to alcohol and drugs".

A friend of mine, Stefan Ott, more recently (April 1975) explained the resulting situation further:

"... the squatters set up a local community, where the most active of them took action to help the weaker ones, primarily the many drug addicts. Instead of sending them to official cure homes, they remained in Christiania, under the treatment of their friends. They started to police the community themselves, and after a while pushers learned that it was not possible to sell drugs at Christiania any longer. They were simply thrown out. This does not mean that there are no drugs in Christiania, but the number of drug addicts is decreasing rapidly. A few months ago they sent about 30 addicts on a cure trip to Egypt—they paid the whole thing themselves—and they have returned with good chances for most of them to be cured. The place has been called a 'social experiment' and as such it has so far been accepted by the authorities. The inhabitants prefer to call it an Alternative Community.

"In Denmark, however, we have seen a serious turn to the right in politics. Our government is social-democrat, but it is a minority government, based on the votes from the right wing. This right wing has now started to react. They demand that the place be stopped and the inhabitants thrown out and spread among 'decent citizens'. I would say that this reaction is almost classic: the State does not want the success of an alternative system."

In Britain too, the easy stereotype of the squatters as a bunch

of drop-outs, junkies and weirdos, has proved a simple way of stereotyping them as a squalid nuisance, best eliminated. This stereotype conceals several important aspects of the squatters movement. The first of these, in terms of a society whose legislation on mental health envisages a policy of Community Care, is that in situations comparable to that in Copenhagen described by Stefan Ott, the community as a whole does not care, and the squatters frequently do. The second is that quite often, as in Tolmers Village in north London, the squatters have emerged as the most effective spokesmen for a community threatened with destruction through redevelopment, and the third is that with the demise of the private landlord and with the social priorities and assumptions of local authorities as landlords, there exist whole sections of the community for whom any housing provision remains. The squatters' movement has moved from being a protest to being one of the normal modes of tenure in London and many other cities.

It is estimated that there are from 20,000 to 25,000 squatters in London, and about 10,000 in the other British cities. There may be many more, since not everyone wants to advertise the fact that he is an unauthorised occupier. With such numbers of people involved we have a proliferation of squatters' organisations and federations and a variety of legal handbooks and manuals for squatters. We have legal and unofficial squatters, and, needless to say, we have those who are considered worthy and those who are stigmatised as unworthy.

We also have the official reaction. Predictably this does not relate to the situation that made squatting necessary and possible, the existence of vast numbers of publicly owned but unoccupied dwellings. In 1972 the Lord Chancellor invited the Law Commission to look into the law of forcible entry and in practice to consider how these obsolete laws (of 1381 to 1623) could be made effective in a contemporary context. The Law Commission responded in July 1974 with a document *Working Paper No. 54: Criminal Law Offences of Entering and Remaining on Property*. The legislation envisaged would move squatting from the range of civil law to that of criminal law with the usual penal sanctions. Our rulers are too sophisticated to introduce laws with this sole effect, it will come, if it comes, in a vague and general piece of legislation about vagrancy, soliciting, etc., in order to defuse it in the minds of worried MPs.

Certainly when our very latest variety of super-sensitive, ultra-

leftwing councillors in London come together, their first topic of conversation is not whatever you thought it might be, but how to deal with the squatters. The real crime, and perhaps the real triumph of the squatters' movement, is that it has called the bluff of those who believe in political action. The squatters have shown that they can rehabilitate housing more quickly and more effectively than the official system can. (And the system, in an unacknowledged way, is admitting this.) The squatters too have shown, as Mike Kingham remarks in his article "Tenant Self-management—the Experience of Family Squatting Associations" in the *Housing Review* for July-August 1974, that "these groups have shown self-management to be viable in the unpromising field of short life housing and . . . may work better where permanent housing is concerned".

The wisest thing Mike Kingham has to say is not in fact about squatting but about the nature of our society: "The vast majority of people in society have not been, and almost certainly are not being, educated as active participating citizens. The emphasis in our educational system, certainly above primary level, is on obedience and submission. Attitudes of paternalism and authoritarianism are deeply embedded in our culture and we are only beginning to move towards the point where there is any widespread acceptance of enlightened educational philosophy and recognition that in our increasingly complex and open society, citizenship is a necessary social skill. . . . The skills of democratic practice, debate and decision-making are alien to many of the families who come to family squatting groups. Participation is an educational process for them, and it is a slow one, especially for a family which has learned only resignation and despair in the face of restricted life chances. The wider dispersal of power and responsibility in our society is as inevitable as it is essential; but progress will be uneven and mistakes unavoidable."

## 2. Human Needs

### HOUSING AND HUMAN NEEDS

Danilo Dolci's work in Trappeto and Partinico, as he says himself, is merely scratching the surface of the distress of the poverty-stricken Sicilians. Its social importance is in its challenge to the moral responsibility of the North. "I want to impress on you," he says, "that in this district where 50 per cent of the 50,000 people are starving and many escape death only by trespassing on other people's rights, someone is actually dying of starvation because we have lent no helping hand." At a protest meeting in Rome after Dolci's arrest, prominent Italians affirming their solidarity with him included Ignazio Silone and Carlo Levi, who in a new book *Le Parole Sono Pietre* writes about the late Rocco Scotellaro, a devoted interpreter of the *contadini* of Lucania, about the murder of Salvatore Carnevale, a Sicilian peasant who tried to organise a union, and about Dolci and his work. Levi returns from his journeys in the South re-affirming the belief in peasant autonomy (*autogoverno, autonomia contadina*) with which he concluded *Christ Stopped at Eboli* in which he wrote of his hope in "an organic federation of autonomous rural communes".

But, he declares, "the autonomy or self-government of the community cannot exist without the autonomy of the factory, the school, and the city, of every form of social life".

Readers of that earlier book will remember—they could hardly forget—Levi's description of the "peasant city" of Matera in Lucania where 15,000 people, half the population, lived in the *Sassi*, the caves which honeycomb the steep hillside. The impact

of this description was one of the factors which led to the initiation of a social survey of the town, started by Dr. F. G. Friedmann, with Rockefeller Foundation funds, and of plans for a new town, La Martella, for the inhabitants of the Sassi, financed by the Unnra-Casa administration.

The rehousing programme could have been viewed simply as a technical matter: so many units to be rehoused in sanitary barracks or in an impressive monument to its architects. This kind of solution was not confined to the Italy of Mussolini. But as Patrick Geddes wrote in enunciating his principle of Survey Before Plan, the task of town-planning "is not to coerce people into new places against their associations, wishes and interests, as we find bad schemes trying to do. Instead its task is to find the right places for each sort of people; places where they will really flourish. To give people in fact the same care that we give when transplanting flowers, instead of harsh evictions and arbitrary instructions to 'move on', delivered in the manner of officious amateur policemen."

Early in the survey of Matera, Professor Friedmann wrote to the architect Ludovico Quaroni, "In order to understand the human reality, we don't want only a minute description, a description coming from the outside, but an intimate penetration dictated, not by sentimentality, but by a profound sense of responsibility." A few years ago, I sat with Quaroni in the pub at the Lansbury Neighbourhood in Poplar (itself an attempt, not entirely unsuccessful, to rebuild a bombed and blighted London district while retaining the spirit of its "human reality") while he explained how the social survey of the ancient community had given shape to the village of La Martella with its central market place from which radiate the clusters of houses, with their chicken runs and kitchen gardens, linked by their stables and barns. A recent description by Federico Gorio, an engineer member of the team which designed La Martella, conveys the spirit of their approach:

"The question looked simple enough: destroy a town because its houses were sordid and unhealthy, and provide more hygienic dwellings for the people; but on the point of taking this very obvious decision one saw a certain brutality in it. Tradition is also the relationship between men and the things around them and biologists as well as sociologists know that destroying the environment sometimes means destroying the species. One tackled

the problem of La Martella with this in mind. The environment had to be saved and transferred with the people; each main function of the village has been considered along with its habits, and in many cases the final choice has been left to the peasants themselves; in fact the general scheme, already completed, has been studied again from the beginning in order to include in it the communal bakery which had not been foreseen and which is an age-old habit in Matera, where each single family takes its own bread to be baked in the communal bakery. Even if La Martella may be said to be non-traditional in the more generally accepted sense of the word, it is traditional in so far as it keeps faith with that bond which unites us with our fellow-men."

Considered as a sociological experiment La Martella has not been an unqualified success. How could it be since it is a pioneering effort in this kind of human planning, and since it exists in an unchanged economic environment? The "problem of the South" remains.

In a recent broadcast on "The Modern Movement in Italian Architecture" Joseph Rykwert commented on the conflict in Italian architectural thought between what is signified in the catchwords "rational" and "organic", and he explained how "organic", beginning as a stylistic description—oblique and curvilinear forms as opposed to rigidly rectilinear ones, came to imply, through the associations and overtones of the word, an approach to design "minimising all formal intention so as to give a total accommodation—physical, moral and psychological—to the inhabitants of the building". As an example, he again took the case of La Martella. "The approach of the architects was not the usual one of simply housing the underprivileged. For these were people who had developed a new way of life which had a dignity, a coherent pattern ennobling even the squalor of the poorest." Of the result one of the architects wrote, "If you consider the village in purely formal terms you may well be disappointed and you will certainly miss the point." To which Mr. Rykwert replies, "Architecture, however, is an art, and those who practise it are in duty bound to use the terms of a formal language. The refusal therefore of the designers of La Martella to consider the formal problem with which they were faced squarely must be considered as a shirking of responsibility."

The dispute between formalists and functionalists in a perennial one—life would be the poorer without it. I would reply in the words used years ago by W. R. Lethaby, "High utility and liberal convenience for noble life are enough for architecture. Consider any of the great forms of life activity—seamanship, farming, house-keeping—can anyone say where utility ends, and style, order, clearness, precision begin? Up to a point, and indeed a long way on, 'style' is a utility. We have to begin again and look on architecture as an art of service from the communal point of view."

If formal considerations are the only criteria in evaluating architecture, a building becomes merely a piece of sculpture: a sculpture big enough for you to get inside, like the wooden horse of Troy. But architecture is not arbitrary: it is subject to more primary disciplines than the formal discipline Mr. Rykwert is asking for. These are the structural disciplines—stability, resistance to weather and decay, and a humane discipline—the accommodation of human needs. I want to suggest, not that the aesthetic quality of a building does not matter, but that it grows out of its structural and functional qualities: the architect has to find those qualities of clarity, proportion, grouping, texture, relation of solids to voids, which most clearly emerge from the fulfilment of those needs which it is his responsibility to satisfy. "Great art" said Lethaby, "like great science, is the discovery of necessity."

But in planning to meet human needs how difficult it is not to formalise even them into preconceptions or statistical averages which do not meet the *actual* requirements of the individual people who will occupy the building. Mr. Rykwert described how the Milanese architect Giancarlo de Carlo, having built a block of flats at Sesto San Giovanni, spent one Sunday sitting in a café opposite, watching the way people were using the building. Of this experience de Carlo said,

"I suffered all the violence they generated in attacking the building to make it their home. The secluded balconies facing the south were covered with laundry out to dry and the people were all on the access galleries facing north. They had put out stools and chairs to watch and take part in the spectacle of each other and of the street. The very narrowness of the galleries excited the children who were running their bicycle races along them. . . . It was then I understood how mistaken my approach

had been, in spite of its apparently rational basis. Orientation matters, and so does a view of the landscape and light privacy; but what matters most is to be able to see each other, to be together. It is communication which counts most."

The anecdote is interesting for several reasons. Firstly because the architect is a sympathiser of ours who once contributed to *Freedom* an article on this very issue: the question of "building for human beings as they really are instead of for the abstract men conceived by the state". It interested me too because I have had the opposite experience with flats in London, planned on the same principle, with an access balcony to the entrances and a private balcony big enough to sit around and grow flowers in, on the sunny side. For while we had provided a sort of passing bay, a widening of the access balcony opposite each entrance door to provide room for neighbourly gossip, it is little used, while the private balconies always are. A survey of the opinions of the occupants of balcony-access flats in England concludes that "Most people tend to be reserved in their social contacts, saying that it is not policy to be too friendly with neighbours, but they would like to know them sufficiently well to be able to ask for help if an emergency arose. Bearing this in mind, the access balcony and to a lesser extent the access staircase provide what could in time become a pleasant social grouping of people who, while not overtly very friendly, nevertheless class each other as 'nice people' and like being neighbours."

But it isn't for architects or their clients to lay down the law on whether people should live communally or in glorious isolation. (In this country fifty years ago, planners were deploring the lugger-mugger mateyness of the slums which made their occupants unwilling to move out to hygienic and dispersed housing estates. Now they deplore the semi-detached suburban sprawl which has resulted, without reflecting that it is *their* ideas which have changed.) What is needed is to plan with sufficient flexibility and ingenuity to satisfy the needs of every kind of tenant and to extend rather than limit the variety of ways in which he can choose to live.

Today in this and other countries a large proportion of houses and flats are built by local authorities with the aid of subsidies from the state. This arose, of course, from the fact that working class housing for letting ceased to be an economic proposition for private financial speculation. Housing by public authorities

was not instituted by an all-embracing state seeking ever greater control over its subjects, but through the efforts of nobly-intentioned people who were appalled by the squalor, disease and high mortality in overcrowded insanitary hovels. But as in institution it leads continually to just that view of the occupants as numbers, as abstractions, as "housing units" of which de Carlo complains. I used to keep a note of newspaper reports of the well-meant but insufferably inquisitive and inquisitorial attitude of local councils to their tenants. Here are some, relating not to flats but to housing estates. No washing on the line after 12 noon (Essex), compulsory to burn coke (Notts.), no dogs (Middlesex), evicted for painting his house cream—all the rest were red (Warrington), forbidden to paint doorstep (Bardwell), evicted for keeping pigeons if tenant is not a member of National Homing Union (Staffs.), tenants graded according to cleanliness—lowest grade must go (Ely), no trees to be planted in garden without permission (Lancs.). Finally, Hastings Corporation issues its tenants with a handbook containing the following instructions: "Keep your home clean and tidy. Endeavour to have some method of cleaning as you go along; do not try to clean the whole house in one day. Regular bed times for children and adults, except on special occasions. Sit down properly at the table. Hang up your pots and pans or put them on a shelf. . . ." How right Auden was when he wrote, *Private faces in public places/ Are wiser and nicer/ Than public faces in private places.*

Some of these regulations are just the reflection of the school-ma'am mentality of petty officials, others reflect the feeling that for the comfort of all, the personal exuberance of each must be curbed. But this is where the architect's responsibility comes in. He has to find ways of planning that will give the tenants scope for the maximum of human vagaries with the least annoyance to his neighbour, rather than the minimum of accommodation that will comply with sanitary bylaws, and rather than an impressive monument to the genius of the architect.

He has to find, as Gropius says, "a common language of architecture and its individual variations, a humanised standard, fitting the whole of our community, but simultaneously satisfying also, by its modifications, the different desires of individuals . . .". De Carlo's expression about the people *attacking* his building to make it their home is very apt. The architect's task is both ubiquitous and humble; he has to use his skill to transform the environment *in order that* people may attack it to make it theirs.

"The writer of the article 'Housing and Human Needs' (30/6/56) suggests that a local authority is wrong to insist that the tenants of its council houses do not change the colour of their houses to something different from that of all their neighbours. Surely he is tumbling over backwards in trying to prove how anarchistic he is, and in doing so only reaches the *reductio ad absurdum* of anarchy and finds himself obliged to praise chaos. What possible virtue is there in ruining the appearance of a street for the sake of somebody's whim? The rules are not an infringement to the tenant's freedom, they are simply a condition of the tenancy which he accepts in renting the house. . . ."—*Reader's Letter.*

The case in point was that of a man who was given notice to quit his council house in Warrington because he painted it cream when all the rest of the estate was painted red. The *Manchester Guardian* which reported the instance did not make it clear whether it was the structure of the house as a whole which was red, or, as is more likely, the windows, doors, gutters, rainwater pipes and so on which were red; which seems to indicate a lack of understanding of how paint should be used, for apart from any aesthetic considerations it is almost always better to use a light paint on window frames, on account of its greater reflection of light. The tenant, Mr. Mulhall, a farm worker, said he just couldn't stand the colour, and as soon as he moved in, set about repainting the house. The Town Clerk said that his council took action because the repainting clashed with the rest of the estate and because it was done without permission.

If we assume that neither Mr. Mulhall nor the Borough Engineer are among the eight per cent of mankind who are colour-blind, and if we assume further that there are objective standards by which these things can be judged, then one or the other of them is right. If Mr. Mulhall is right the moral argument against him collapses and he is the bringer of a new decorative enlightenment to Warrington. If the Council is right then the tenant should still be allowed his cream paint firstly as an affirmation of human values, since a farm worker with six children would not repaint his house at his own expense unless the colour really was driving him round the bend. We can pay too high a price even for civic beauty, that most neglected of amenities. Secondly because, as my friend Giancarlo de Carlo says, the house *is* Man's affirmation in space, his most intimate environment which he must attack to make

it his own. Thirdly because if there is ever again to be that common and vernacular idiom in architecture and design which was the glory of some past societies, it has to grow with its roots in the instincts and the basic structure of the society that adopts it and "breathes into it the animating spirit of popular sanction". We have to pay attention as J. M. Richards says, to what people themselves want, not what we think they ought to want:

"We may despise what they want. We may think they should be educated to want something different, or at least to know they could have something different if they wished, instead of their choice being limited by their ignorance of the alternatives; but we can only progress democratically at a speed which does not outpace the slow growth of public understanding, in particular its assimilation of social and technical change."<sup>1</sup>

But could the Council be right anyway? We all know groups of buildings whose visual harmony has been ruined by someone's self-assertive individualism—a house in a Georgian or Regency terrace for example, painted to the meticulously determined centre-line of the party wall, through the middle of columns, pilasters and pediments, in some colour contrasting with that of the rest, with a brutal disregard of the unity of design of the whole. But the facades of the usual run of modern small houses are not part of some formally conceived elevation. They are either of the ubiquitous semi-detached variety whose visual unity, if they have any, is not much affected by paint, or they are in short terraces which are repetitive rather than unified. It could be claimed that variegated decorative treatment would spoil the look of such a row of houses, but one could also take as an example a town like Clifden in Connemara (and Mr. Mulhall is an Irishman), the beauty of which comes from the variety of colour-wash which the occupants have given to the tight and continuous street elevations of their houses, with, cheek-by-jowl, browns, ochres, creams, pinks and oatmeal colours, and the window-surrounds picked out in white, black or dark brown. The feeling for colour and variety is the heritage of a people whose decorative urges have not been atrophied by industrial society and by leaving things to the landlord or the borough surveyor. Even the alleged mysteries of architectural proportion are not foreign to the people of the west of Ireland. J. M. Synge wrote of the Kerry peasantry that they

"would discuss for hours the proportions of a new building—how

high a house should be if it was a certain length, with so many rafters in order that it might look well . . .".<sup>2</sup>

Nothing, you might say, is going to give the council tenants of Warrington the unsophisticated vision of the Irish peasantry, who are losing it themselves anyway; and you might be right. But this is not surprising when whatever feeling for colour they may have is kept in abeyance by municipal edict. And if the freedom of the paint-pot results in something horrible you have to put up with it and set about the visual education of the children. Lionel Brett once made this point very clear when he said:

"I do not see how we can preach visual education one day and practice visual censorship the next. If we are aiming at a visually educated democracy there is only one way, and that is to teach people to use their eyes and then accept their judgement however much we disapprove of it. With power goes responsibility and if we bestow the first we must not withhold the second."<sup>3</sup>

In Sweden, at a new housing estate called Arsta, south of Stockholm, the architects Erik and Tore Ahlsén, wanting the tenants to take an interest and a pride in the buildings "have permitted and encouraged anyone who wished to lend a hand in decorating the facades in their own fashion with brightly coloured distemper. The lead was taken by an artist. At first people stood around and scoffed as they watched him daubing on the colours."<sup>4</sup> Then one or two, and then others joined in. Two friends of mine have visited these buildings. One says that they are charming and amusing, the other says that they are awful. But whether outsiders like it or not, the *social* result which the Ahlsén brothers were after has certainly been achieved, and one can imagine the heated debate among the tenants before they decide to repaint the whole place a subdued grey! There at least were people who realised that if the tenants were to take interest and pride in their surroundings, it was necessary for them to "attack" their environment. In this country, the Central Housing Advisory Committee in its report on *The Appearance of Housing Estates* very sensibly concludes that:

"Unnecessary restrictions, or those which are not seen by the tenants to be necessary, have the effect of discouraging his initiative and interest. . . . It may well be that a tenant's taste in such matters, for example, as porches or trellis screens, may not be that of the Housing Committee or of the Council's officers, and that such things may at times distract somewhat from the original harmony of the architect's design. It should however, be recognised

that if the tenant's activities are too frequently met by prohibition it is likely to produce indifference and apathy, and that the greater a tenant's freedom in this respect, the greater is likely to be his pride and interest in the appearance of his house and garden."<sup>5</sup>

Take the front door. Here is a place where the tenant or his wife love to assert their individuality and their difference from the people next door. And yet one hears of members of the LCC Architect's Department driving through the council's estates with a plan on their knees, deciding, "this one yellow, that one red, and that one blue, I think", when this decision above all, should be made by the people who live in the houses. I believe that on some LCC estates at least a choice of colours is given to the tenants.

You may think this is all rather trivial. Local authorities are not generally tyrants. (The proportion of tenants who leave council houses each year as a result of notice to quit is about 0.1 per cent, or some 2,500 families out of a total of 2½ million tenancies,<sup>6</sup> and hardly any of these were for the sin of painting the doorstep or keeping pigeons.) But here, as in everything else, we find the day-to-day choice between libertarian and authoritarian solutions. Either we believe in seeking libertarian solutions, or we accept authoritarian ones because it is easier than trying out ways of making authority superfluous. I believe in the continual enlargement of the area of human freedom and responsibility. I believe like Kropotkin that the only cure for the abuse of freedom is more freedom. Whether it is a matter of painting council houses or of dismembering the colonial empire, people should have *freedom* before they are "ready" for it. That is the only way they will ever learn to use it and explore it, and to grow to the stature of free men.

1. J. M. Richards: *The Castles on the Ground*.
2. J. M. Synge: *In Wicklow and West Kerry*.
3. Lionel Brett: speech at the RIBA, 15 Nov., 1949.
4. Eric de Mare in the *Architectural Review*.
5. *The Appearance of Housing Estates*, HMSO 1948.
6. *Unsatisfactory Tenants*, HMSO 1955.

## BETHNAL GREEN: A MUSEUM OF HOUSING

The prefabs I had come to see in Bethnal Green were put up a month ago by the London County Council on some of the pockets of land awaiting re-development, as a stop-gap measure because of the manifest failure of housing to keep pace with employment in London. The idea is that when the site is permanently re-developed, in, say, five years, the house is picked up and moved elsewhere. (Not with the tenants in: they are expected to have been found accommodation by then.)

Compared with the prefabs of the immediate post-war years, they struck me as the product of a joinery shop rather than of an aircraft factory. They are better looking, better heated and insulated, but very much smaller. They look like kiosks at the entrance to an exhibition, or like classrooms which have somehow become detached from a new primary school. The real problems of prefabrication—as a means of providing more homes more quickly and at a lower cost—are not touched upon here. But this was not the intention. If you were homeless you would regard one as heaven; if you were a housing manager you would see them as a confession of failure.

Within a stone's throw of the new prefabs I saw some of the old prefabs of 1946, which, some of you may remember, were supposed to have a life of ten years. They are still there, in the little gardens which the tenants have planted around them. "No, I don't want to leave it for one of those flats," one of the

Broadcast on BBC Radio Three, 6 December, 1962. Printed in *Anarchy*, January 1963.

tenants told me. And she brought me face to face with the endless argument about Bethnal Green, in which normally unemotional words like dog, rabbit-hutch, backyard and parlour, are ranged against phrases like "sea of asphalt", "inhuman scale", "sanitary desert" and so on. The new prefabs are simply the latest, temporary exhibit in what is not only a sociologist's zoo, but an architectural museum. It is all there, every mean or patronising or sentimental or brutal or humane assumption about the housing needs of the urban working class.

And as I wandered through these streets I could see the argument documented in a hundred years of rehousing. The oldest exhibit, Baroness Burdett-Coutts' Columbia Square housing, completed exactly a hundred years ago, is being demolished at this moment. Grim, with Gothic trimmings, nobody mourns it, except perhaps members of the Victorian Society—who never had to live there. The Baroness, a banking heiress with Charles Dickens as her mentor, set out to replace a squalid slum called Nova Scotia Gardens with model workmen's tenements. "You cannot fail to be struck," Dickens told her, "by the consideration that if large buildings had been erected for the working people, instead of the absurd and expensive separate walnut shells in which they live, London would have been about one-third of its present size." Her architect, H. A. Darbishire, believed in healthy draughts, and ensured that a high wind blew from the central staircases set in huge open arches, through the wide access gallery running the length of the five-storey blocks. Darbishire went on to build the adjacent and far more sumptuous Columbia Market, for which a use could never be found, as well as the first of the Peabody Trust's Buildings. Columbia Square was lavish compared with *them*.

Every Liverpool Street commuter knows the next exhibit, the endless parallel blocks of the Improved Industrial Dwellings, where Alderman Waterlow expected a net return of six per cent on his philanthropic capital. Ninety years later, after the successful direct action of the tenants last year—a rent strike and spectacular demonstrations—the Minister confirmed a compulsory purchase order on the grounds that the rents which have been progressively increased in the last few years "are exorbitant for what the tenants are getting or seem likely to get". Millicent Rose once remarked that the chief architectural feature of these blocks is the galvanised iron tub hanging on a nail outside every scullery window, revealing that there is not a single bathroom in the

place.

Nor for that matter were bathrooms provided in any of the London County Council's own flats until after the First World War. But when we turn to the Boundary Road Estate, the first great slum clearance scheme of the infant LCC in the eighteen-nineties, we are in a different world from that of either the Baroness or the Alderman. It replaced a notorious slum—the Jago of Arthur Morrison's novel—where one child in four died in infancy. Short tree-lined avenues radiate from a central circus with a bandstand in the middle, and laundries, workshops and sheds for coster-mongers' barrows were included. Several young architects in the LCC's newly formed department worked on the scheme, each doing one section—which explains the unforced variety of the estate. They were influenced by the socialism of William Morris and by its architectural expression in the work of Philip Webb, though they handled the vernacular idiom more freely and unselfconsciously than their master. These buildings, with their romantic skyline and lovingly-handled durable detailing, have weathered well, and today in their autumnal severity, stand out like the same architects' Millbank and Webber Row estates in other parts of London, as some of the finest work of their period. The architectural verve and warmth of feeling towards the people who were to live in the new flats did not survive long in the LCC architects' department, which did not recover that spirit until the nineteen-fifties.

The blocks of flats of the interwar years, whether the mechanical neo-Georgian of the LCC with its heavy brick access balconies, or the even more nondescript work of the Bethnal Green Borough Council, seems windswept, institutional and faceless. I walked past rows and rows of such blocks before suddenly coming upon the Borough Council's recent "cluster" block in Claredale Street. The architect, Denys Lasdun, has sought to provide vertically for that horizontal matey neighbourliness which we have been taught to associate with the tight little terraces of old Bethnal Green—freed now from the stigma of slumdom by the depopulation of the borough. (130,000 people lived there in 1901. By 1919 this had fallen to 68,000; in 1951 to 58,000 and in 1955, 54,000.) "Dilapidated but cosy, damp but friendly," observed Young and Willmott, "in the eyes of most Bethnal Greeners these cottages *are* the place, much more so than the huge blocks of tenement buildings standing guard, like dark fortresses, over the little houses." I could not decide, on the strength of a casual visit,

whether Mr. Lasdun's experiment was a dark fortress or a vertical street. He hoped, by bringing the short wings of the block (which cluster around a central core containing lifts and services), within talking distance of each other to reduce the isolation which many tenants of the new flats complain of. A survey by Willmott and Cooney suggests that he has not really succeeded in this aim, but at least he hasn't pursued it at the expense of anyone's privacy. He *has* contrived to make a very large tall building conceal its bulk and maintain the scale of its surroundings.

The external surfaces of this building are of unclad concrete, straight from the shuttering, even in the entrance, where the children have chalked nuclear disarmament signs, Kevin Loves Sheila and so on. Personally I am nearly as fond as Jack Robinson of writings on walls, and I adhere to the architectural philosophy suggested to me by Giancarlo de Carlo, that the occupants of our buildings must "attack" them, to make them their own. I like the scribbles, but do the tenants? It's hard to get chalk off rough concrete anyway. Has Mr. Lasdun misjudged the mood of Bethnal Green, where—in Nelson Street under the shadow of one of the less appetising LCC blocks, one householder has painted the entire elevation of his two-storey house green, with every mortar-joint picked out in white, or where in Tecsdale Road, whose three-storey houses are built in those hard red shiny bricks from the Midlands, another has set to work to make them even redder and shinier by painting them a glossy maroon?

Hasn't, in fact, the New Brutalism come at just the wrong moment to a Bethnal Green where the celebrated Mums have begun to read the gracious living magazines, and where the girls all look like Helen Shapiro, and the children in their blazers exercise their poodles—unless they live in the dogless flats?

My fewest misgivings in Bethnal Green were when I saw some of the recent work of the LCC architects. The Avebury Estate in Gosset Street, for example—a mixture of high and low buildings. Here, in a gesture of neighbourly recognition, the entrance to Lygon House frames a vista of some of the mid-nineteenth century terraces. Lorden Walk, a low staggered terrace of gabled cottages, pays homage—rather fussily—to an earlier urban tradition. Eversley House actually has sculpture outside. Better, perhaps, architecturally, are their very latest jobs like the little square carved out of Elsworth Street, where the detailing is robust and quite free from municipal gentility.

What the cluster blocks and the latest LCC work have in common is that they have turned their back on the mechanical repetitive geometry of layout which characterises almost all the older re-development in the borough.

After a hundred years of rehousing in this battered East London borough we are still just learning how to do it. We know what the problem is. How to provide high density urban housing which has that particular kind of amenity and intimacy and shelteredness that people persist in associating with the word *home*. Any citizen of Bethnal Green will tell you that in different words. A few architects can show you how to do it. The LCC architects themselves are attempting it in their experimental housing now being built in Angrave Street, Shoreditch.

Most architects can tell you that the principle obstacles are not technical or aesthetic or even financial, but are simply the restrictions imposed by building byelaws and regulations. In their reaction against squalor, overcrowding and poor ventilation, the architects of the old tenements prescribed howling gales for their tenants deliberately. Today we provide draughty access balconies way up in the air, absent-mindedly, and pretend that draughts don't exist. We have to build high and wide apart, because the regulations don't allow us to build compactly even when we build low. It isn't surprising that, given our climate, the word that sums up what the old Bethnal Green has, and most of the new Bethnal Green hasn't, is . . . domesticity.

## HUMAN ASPECTS OF HIGH DENSITY HOUSING

More ink and verbiage have been poured out on the subject of density than on any other aspect of housing or town planning. But density is not a thing, or even an ideological banner, it is simply a yardstick, a measure. By a low density I mean the rule of thumb for local authority suburban housing between the wars, twelve houses, or say fifty persons, to the acre. Middle-class suburban housing of the same period was built at eight, six or even four houses to the acre. But the figures tell us

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Lecture given to fourth year students at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College, London, 12 March, 1963.

nothing. The rich in Park Lane live at a density of two hundred people to the acre and so do the poor up the Edgware Road. In Singapore there are 900 people to the acre, in parts of Paddington, according to Peter Shephard, there are 400 people to the acre. At Copacabana, the fashionable part of Rio de Janeiro, there are, according to William Holford, over 1,000 to the acre.

A high density is usually taken to mean that point on the scale which reaches twenty-five houses, or a hundred habitable rooms or persons to the acre. This is the density on the LCC's housing at Wimbledon and Roehampton. The density on the Lansbury neighbourhood in Poplar is 136, that at Pimlico is 200, and the residential density of the Barbican scheme is 230 to the acre. (Geoffrey Powell tells me that the original proposal was for 300.)

There must be some theoretical point at which the whole character of life changes as we move higher on the density scale, but we don't know where that point is, and it obviously differs for different places and different social groups, and especially for different age groups within a population. Now when the argument about the need to increase residential densities was at its height, one of the points bandied around in favour of high densities was the way in which the rich lived at very high densities in Park Lane and seemed to enjoy it. The opponents of high densities replied that people who lived in Park Lane had the vast expanse of Hyde Park on the other side of the road and that they were consequently living in the skyscraper-in-a-park Corbusian style—not the skyscraper-and-no-park style which is the only sort of high density housing we are likely to get.

It is rather a pity that the Park got mixed up in the argument at all because all that talk about the way in which the trees purified the air concealed the real reasons why the rich were able to live successfully at a high density.

A large part of the answer lies in services. When you look at the plan of some Renaissance palace you become very conscious that in the past services were not an architectural problem. As Le Corbusier put it, "Lucky old Ledoux: no pipes." Piped, ducted or mechanical services were not needed because all the services had two legs. There were plenty of people whose labour was cheap and who had no higher ambition than to wait on their betters, to do all the fetching and carrying and clearing up. Even today, in the houses of the better-off, services,

both human and inanimate, oil the wheels of life, in ways which are taken for granted for them, but certainly not for the occupants of high density housing provided by public authorities. And the services themselves are serviced more efficiently.

The rest of the answer, so far as our hypothetical rich are concerned, is in the different nature of their family life. They are out of the house more, because they can afford to be. Mum isn't isolated at home with the babies, she is out shopping at Harrods. The children, when small, are taken to Kensington Gardens by Nannie. At the age of eight they go to a preparatory school, and at thirteen to a public school, both of them residential. And during the holidays they are either away in the country, or winter-sporting, sailing and so on; golden and brown in the playful wind and summer sun. At any rate they are not hanging around on the landing or playing with the dustbin lids.

Now let us compare the facilities available to the occupants of high density housing, not with those enjoyed by the rich, but with those available to the occupant of the twelve-to-the-acre suburban houses. You may say of course, that this is not fair, after all the urbanite has *his* advantages—he is spared the ridiculous daily journey to work and the high fares, he is nearer to the bright lights, the facilities of the big city, you can't have the best of both worlds. But of course if you don't want the best of both worlds what on earth do you want? The suburbanite in fact has greater privacy, greater freedom from noise, both of neighbours and traffic, greater freedom to make a noise, no bother about refuse collection, the likelihood of public open spaces nearby, and above all, the garden. I am thinking of the garden, not only for horticulture and food production, but as an outside room, a place where washing can be hung out to dry, mats shaken, motor-cycles taken to pieces, things not wanted in the house dumped, and young children deposited with safety. Can any equivalent for these facilities be provided for the high density urban dwellers?

The answer is that they could be, but that they most likely won't be. They could be provided even though at a much greater expense, if the need for them is acknowledged at the planning stage as important, and is not whittled away for financial reasons later, or because other conflicting needs are later given greater priority.

Privacy can be provided for, and the different aspects of the noise question can all be tackled, if you really have the budget

to do it. Noise from neighbours is a matter of the sensible placing of windows, of foresight in planning the day and night zones of the flat, and of adequate sound insulation. Here there is a real conflict with other requirements. You can blanket noise on landings and corridors by using acoustic materials on the ceilings, but noise transmitted through the structure needs weight to diminish it, weight which is precisely a factor which we want to reduce for other reasons. An inch of expanded polystyrene will give you thermal insulation as good as that from nine inches of brickwork, with a weight of virtually nothing at all, but unfortunately the brickwork will give you incomparably better sound insulation. The one golden rule in blocks of flats is to use solid floors or else very thick screeds (which you may want to have anyway if you are using thermal-storage floor warming)—unless you can ensure structural discontinuity, and I don't know how on earth you can do that economically. In this connection it is very important to know something which is rarely told to the architect: whether the heating is to be supplied automatically and included in the rent, or whether it is to be paid for separately by the tenant—who may very well feel obliged to economise.

On the question of refuse disposal: in practice you won't have any choice, but in theory there is the choice between individual portage, as enjoyed by the wealthy in their service flats, or of refuse chutes—the standard municipal solution—to which a lot of improvements could be made if someone thought it worthwhile to invent them. There are other alternatives of course: tenants taking their own bins down to a yard full of dustbins—scarcely to be recommended, or the Garchey system of water-borne refuse disposal which as you know has scarcely been tried in this country beyond one famous example. Whatever system is used, you ought to supplement it with a dry refuse store, easily accessible, available to the tenant by right, and frequently emptied. That is, if you are going to avoid unwilling hoarding of rubbish, needless friction over its disposal, furtive dumping of old mattresses in dark corners by night, and children kicking cardboard cartons round the staircase landings.

You will have noticed that while I am supposed to be talking about *social* factors, I am actually speaking of quite prosaic architectural matters—those things on which we are assumed to be technically competent. But these *are* human aspects of urban life of the greatest importance, and before I leave these

purely architectural matters I ought to mention a few other peculiarities of high flats which affect the well-being of tenants. A sixteen-storey block is not by any means the same as four four-storey blocks on top of each other, and for the comfort of the occupants as well as for ease and economy of maintenance it needs a much higher standard of detailing than a low building. There is, for instance the question of micro-climatology: a much greater exposure to high winds and driving rain. Windows must really fit and shut tight—standard wooden windows or standard metal sections with a one-point fixing are just not good enough. Never use less than 32 oz. glass in a high block: quarter-inch glass is better, weather-stripping is desirable and you ought seriously to consider double-glazing. Windows should be cleanable from inside without acrobatics and all opening lights should have a safety device to protect children. You are likely to have settled for mechanical ventilation to bathrooms and WCs: you should also think about what happens when the mechanical system breaks down. Needless to say you want a much higher than usual standard of thermal insulation in the external walls and to the roof and to any balcony recesses, and you also want foolproof sealing of the joints around windows and openings.

Changes in the Means of Escape code now permit tall blocks of flats to have a single staircase (in addition to the lifts of course). Minimum requirements invariably become standard practice in building, and we already have—and are going to have more—tall blocks in which the access landings have a current of air blowing through. The Fire Brigade *wants* a howling gale on the landings to blow smoke out of the building so that tenants can escape and not choke to death. The architects seek to modify this by providing screens or louvres so that the current of air comes in at a low level and then rises over the heads of people on the landings. Having done this, we convince ourselves that a high wind does not frequently swirl around the entrance doors to flats and around people waiting for the (slow-speed) lifts. But in fact it does, and in a 16-storey block with four flats to a floor sixty families are going to experience frequent discomfort in much of the year for sixty years.

I am not certain, but I think, that the kind of extra-wide balcony access that they have at Park Hill, Sheffield, is preferable to the deliberately created wind-tunnel that you get from the blow-through type of landing in single-staircase tower blocks. It would be better if we accepted that the higher you build, the more lavish

you must be in every way.

I must now turn to the most serious deficiency of most high-density housing: the lack of consideration for the needs of children. Architects and housing managers, as well as housing committees, tend to assume that in high blocks of flats, families without young children will occupy the upper floors, and that those with children will be in the lower floors only, while play facilities will be provided within sight of earshot of their homes for children under five. But the Housing Centre's recent report *Two to Five in High Flats* provides ample evidence that this assumption is far from correct, and that in spite of all sorts of official recommendations, "official practice has lamentably failed to keep pace with precept".

Now children's needs are as worthy of respect as anyone else's, and children need to be able to play with water and mud and to make a noise, build huts and so on, above all they need, through play, to learn about co-operative social relationships. If they don't get a chance to play out their childhood, they are certainly going to make a nuisance of themselves when they are older. The aimless horseplay which disfigures adolescent life is probably the result of inadequate play in childhood.

Provision for play in high-density housing is very difficult—the high cost of land devoted to this purpose frightens off most local authorities—partly for the fortuitous technical reason that it has to be borne by the housing account and not by that of the Parks Department or the Education Department which are not expected to balance *their* budgets. All we can say is that the social cost of failing to provide for play is enormous. I don't suppose it is necessary for me to describe the differing needs of children of various ages, except to add that the swings and roundabouts approach is not very useful and that the adventure playground idea and its indoor equivalents provide the most continuous satisfaction for the widest range of age and interests. But the adventure playground presents a picture of visual disorder and is a generator of noise; and the problem for architects is one of sufficient enclosure and sequestration combined with easy accessibility. It is a problem, but we just have to find solutions for it. Part of the solution rests with our attitude to children as such. If we regard them as an unavoidable nuisance, little nuisances is undoubtedly what they become. If we see them as allies in seeking a bit of fun and spontaneity in life, we might find that that is just what they are.

I have said hardly anything about the great sociological imponderables of urban life, the various surveys of tenant reactions and questionnaire answers on high density housing. This is partly because there is an awful tendency among architects to want to be sociologists, and partly because the surveys tend to cancel each other out, providing little hard data for the architect to work on, and partly too because they often relate to decisions which are not his to make. We find people whose lives are miserable because their jobs are futile and silly, or because they carry their own chains around with them, in town, suburb or village: the environment has nothing to do with their misery. We find high-density neuroses amongst housewives in town just as we find suburban neuroses in the semi-detached belt. These result from social or personal situations of frustrations which hardly come within our terms of reference as architects.

The current trend, as you know, among social investigators—they have such a fixation on Bethnal Green—is to lament the passing of what they consider to be the rich and rewarding community life of the traditional working class environment. Architects have conscientiously tried to provide the physical background for the contemporary equivalent of such an environment, or have dressed up their own predilections with an ideological superstructure which says that that is what they are doing. They have not been very successful.

When we talk about restoring the human-scale community to the big city, critics observe that many people come to the big city precisely in order to have the anonymity and freedom from neighbours which they could not find in a small community. Paul Goodman, in one of his essays about New York points out that it is those individualistic people who come to the city to escape small-town mores, who form the only real community in the city, the intellectual, artistic and beatnik stratum of Greenwich Village. The architect's part in the intangible affair of the growth of a community is the modest one of leaving alternatives open, of not leaving the site so buttoned up and designed to the nth degree, that anything that anybody does spoils the masterpiece of his master-mind. If his architecture is so fragile that he has to control the design of the lettering, or what kind of curtains the tenants choose, then it isn't very useful.

The occupants have to attack their environment, to modify it and make it their own. Otherwise they will always be like moujiks, gingerly camping out in the drawing room of the Tsar's

palace, half awed and half resentful of the load of architecture that has been handed out to them. If the place turns out to be a neighbourhood or a community, with a character and a zest of its own, it will probably happen in spite of, and not because of, our efforts. It is more likely to turn out to be part of the whole mass of changing, interlocking, fragmentary communities, based on common interests or common tasks, whose fluid boundaries have nothing to do with the physical limits of our site or sites.

I don't believe that "community" grows out of having a community association, though the architects should most certainly provide some place where one can meet, but out of shared activities and responsibilities. A quarter of the population of England and Wales live in the 3¼ million dwellings owned by local authorities. But is there one municipal housing estate in this country in which the tenants have any control over and any responsibility for the administration of their estate, of their own intimate environment?

It is questions like this one which seem infinitely more important to me than a lot of sociology about mateyness and neighbourly encounters by the refuse chute. But genuine independence and responsibility is just about the last thing that anyone concerned with housing is willing to give to the people housed. It is like Tolstoy's fable about the rich man who is willing to do anything for the poor man except get off his back. This has very little to do with architecture, but it has a great deal to do with the human problems of urban living, and most especially to do with those of high density living, for few people with any kind of choice would choose to live that way.

## HIGH LIFE

"I love my home" was the phrase heard time and time again when Pearl Jephcott interviewed tenants in Glasgow for her three year study of *Homes in High Flats* financed by the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust (and published by Oliver and Boyd). The minority who loathed the place was, significantly, largely confined to families with more than one small child. There are several possible reasons for the exceptionally high level of satisfaction expressed

From *Town and Country Planning*, March 1972.

in Glasgow. It is a city with a high incidence of respiratory diseases and this may enhance the value put on "the sunniness and smog-free atmosphere of the soaring blocks". Above all, the appalling housing conditions which many of the tenants had previously endured—crumbling, damp, overcrowded, and insanitary tenements—made the well-equipped new high flat seem like the dream house of the Ideal Home Exhibition. "Give us a better house and to hell with any other considerations."

However, tenants were "almost universally agreed that a high flat was not a good home for children, and that it made problems for mothers". Certain types of household found that a high flat suited them better than others. "One such was the middle-aged couple whose children had now left home. If, as was likely, the wife worked outside the home, she did not suffer from the flat's loneliness and the second wage meant that the couple could afford outside interests. The high proportion of tenants who were roughly at this stage in their life-cycle presumably helped to account for Glasgow's high rate of satisfaction with this new type of housing. A second well-suited household was that of the man or woman who did not particularly want to make a settled home, but whose life revolved round job, friends and the recreational opportunities of the bright-light areas."

A type of household which did *not* suit multi-storey living was "the expansive experimentally-minded family which thrived on outdoor life, valued amplitude, preferred space to privacy, spontaneity to order and perhaps quantity to quality. Essentially makers and growers, they were more irked than most by the flats' physical restrictions. For example, they could do nothing about altering the place like adding a porch or a shed. The trim, constricted interior allowed little opportunity of making things even on a small scale. There were no working surfaces, no storage spaces for bulky objects, no rooms where noisy tools or mess or smell could be tolerated." (I recognise my family if not myself in this description, and I am certain to be numbered with that 80 per cent of parents interviewed in the NSPCC study *Children in Flats* who would prefer a house to a flat.) Miss Jephcott also mentions the predicament of the young family with several children which is rather "below average" socially and economically. "As any Sunday morning shopping crowd in Gallowgate demonstrates, Glasgow still has considerable sections of its population who bear the marks of generations of deprivation. High flats are likely to include some of such families; and it is asking a lot

of them suddenly to show the self-restraint, social competence and rather nice habits needed for a satisfactory use of multi-storey housing."

There is nothing sensational about Pearl Jephcott's carefully and sensitively-written report—except perhaps the data on waiting times for lifts in some blocks, and the hazards of dependence on lifts for families, but her conclusions are clear. "Dismissing for the moment the social implications of high flats, there is no clear case on other grounds in favour of them as a form of local authority housing. On the contrary, there are solid arguments against them, particularly because of their excessive cost. As regards social issues, they display few features which might outweigh their disadvantages in other fields and few indications that they make a home which is really satisfactory as distinct from one which is more or less all right. Indeed the evidence from this study indicated that they have positive drawbacks and may conceal actual dangers. Thus the conclusion cannot be avoided that local authorities should discontinue this form of housing except for a limited range of carefully selected tenants or in case of extreme pressure."

But what about the 380,000 high flat homes with their million-odd population which already exist in Britain? Can something be done to make high flats more acceptable? Obviously in the selection of suitable tenants: childless, relatively well-off, and sophisticated. Manchester, I hear, is finding that they can be used for student residences. From Miss Jephcott's study we may conclude that there are several lines of possible improvement: more investment in staff, and in more lavish lifts—both of which are very expensive—and above all community development through self-help. Experience shows, she declares, that "once a new housing estate is allowed to deteriorate, its decline tends to be cumulative; and for high flats, with their excellent initial physical standards, this decline could be particularly painful. Money laid out on community development might also provide a worthwhile investment in citizens as such. The argument here is that, by and large, those willing to try this new form of home seem unusually awake to the possibility of raising the quality of their own lives and that of the new estate as a whole."

A case, I would say, for turning over the block to a tenant co-operative in the hope that community control can salvage something valuable from the expensive experiment in tower-building.

## AWKWARD QUESTIONS IN SPITALFIELDS

The Chicago school of urban geographers invented a phrase, the Zone of Transition, to describe a certain kind of inner city environment, and Spitalfields is a classical example. It is the district just outside the City of London bounded by Whitechapel High Street to the south, the railway from Liverpool Street to the north, Middlesex Street (Petticoat Lane) on the west, and Brady Street on the east. Densely populated in the first decades of this century, its inhabitants have now dwindled to about 9,000 residents.

It is an immensely ancient place. The grain that fed London before the Conquest was grown there, but as peasants were replaced by traders and artisans, supplying the city but outside its jurisdiction, it became a service centre for the metropolis, and a place where new arrivals gained a foothold in the urban economy and learned urban ways. They have left their traces in the street names, the architecture and the characteristic occupations.

The Huguenot silk-weavers were followed by the Irish, who apart from manning the docks to the south, were used to undercut the Huguenots in the weaving trade. Then came the Jews, a few established in the district for centuries, but the vast majority arriving in the great influx that followed the pogroms in the Russian Empire. As they in their turn moved on from the zone of transition, their place has been taken in the last two decades by the Bengalis, the most disadvantaged of all the

incomers, clinging like all their predecessors to the foothold provided by the clothing industry and its ancillaries: labour-intensive, requiring little capital, small in scale, and flexible both in terms of the workspace and the market.

"Blessed be the rag trade" said Gandhi, thinking of the potential of the Singer sewing machine. "Holy, holy, holy, are your bombed stones" says the Yiddish poet Avram Stencl, thinking of these battered streets which, incredibly, still contain the fragile physical reminders of every episode in their history: the broad attic workshop windows of the French silk-weavers' houses in Fournier Street, the corner cafe where Aron Liebermann founded the Hebrew Socialist Union 99 years ago, the house in Brick Lane from which the Pakistanis marched in 1970 to Arbour Square Police Station with banners reading "An End to Police Brutality". And all the while there has been an indigenous population, watching with mystification, and often hostility, the strangers in their midst, each wave more foreign in language, and now colour, from the last.

But there is yet another influx, brought there not by hope but by despair. Just because of its reputation as a "problem" area, Spitalfields and the neighbouring districts in Tower Hamlets attracted an immense charitable urge, Christian, Jewish and secular. The churchyard of Christ Church, Spitalfields, which fulfilled a virtually similar function in Defoe's day, and known to generations of East End children as Itchy Park, is today one of the few places left where London's vagrant alcoholic population can congregate, waiting for the doors to open in Hawksmoor's magnificent crypt. They spread out and occupy the few other public open spaces in the neighbourhood, so that it was possible for a resident, Mr. Benny Bush, to declare at a meeting last month that the playground in Heneage Street was no place for the children of the district since it was monopolised by "fifty to a hundred meths drinkers".

The Chairman closed the meeting early because in the hubbub and confusion no one could be heard. It had been convened in the Montefiore Centre (former premises of the Robert Montefiore School which has moved to a newer but more vulnerable building), to involve the citizens in the Spitalfields Project, latest in a bewildering stream of government-sponsored programmes that seek to come to terms with the Urban Crisis. From the DES we had EPAs, from the DOE we have had GIAs, and now HAAs and Inner Area Studies, and from the Home Office, CDPs, Urban

Aid, and now this experimental five year pilot project to be conducted in Spitalfields (and in North Islington) with the hope that it will provide lessons for other inner city areas.

During the first year £125,000 can be spent in Spitalfields, and it is implied that a similar sum will be available in the succeeding years. A steering group of GLC and Tower Hamlets councillors and of ILEA members has been set up to spend this money, and there they were, at the front of the hall, with their officers flanking the audience, seeking the views of the inhabitants as to how to spend the money. The citizens turned up in hundreds, with an overflow in another hall below, imperfectly linked by microphone and loud speaker.

The meeting was doomed from the start. It was explained from the platform that housing and rehousing were not on the agenda (the sum of money anyway would not even make a dent on housing needs), but that a separate concurrent project was to bring forward the compulsory purchase of substandard housing, and the provision of new homes. I asked a GLC officer for a personal view on the actual implications of this, and I was told that the Home Office cash was really just the icing on the cake, and the real importance of the scheme was acceleration of rehousing. She admitted that this implied a slowing down in other areas.

There are very serious reasons for thinking that, from the point of view of popular participation in environmental improvement, the project is also foredoomed. In the first place, just in order to get hold of that lovely Home Office money, a programme had to be submitted—which rather pre-empts any decision by the populace on what the programme should be. Secondly, the idea that local people and local voluntary organisations should actually spend the money has been steadily whittled down. It was announced at the meeting that they would be formed into a consultative committee without voting rights. At this, David Cheetham, a resident of Brady Street Dwellings, rose to protest that it had been declared at the outset that this particular project was going to be different from all the others by the direct involvement of local people. He asked what had happened to Document PR/279 of the Policy and Resources Committee of the GLC, dated, 30 May, 1974, which had specified that local organisations should be represented on the steering group itself, rather than on some consultative body. Needless to say, there was no answer to this specifically embarrassing question.

Similarly Derek Cox who runs Avenues Unlimited, and was one of the people who started the adventure playground at the back of Christ Church, told me of his disappointment that the project, which envisaged a new wave of professional advisers in the area, had neglected the existing voluntary organisations which suffer from the usual chronic lack of funds. If only, in his opinion, the cash had been funnelled through the bodies already in operation, something might be done.

As it is, the Intermediate Education Centre at Bethnal Green, which serves the area, is packed out, and so is the Valence Youth Club in Chicksand Street. Why couldn't the money be divided out among existing projects? The answer is that the bestowers, whether in Whitehall, County Hall, or the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, have been unwilling to release their hold on the pursestrings.

Real priorities in the area were expressed very clearly by residents themselves. Some lived in blocks of flats built in the inter-war years by the London County Council, and now urgently in need of renovation. A GLC official blandly told enquirers that arrears of maintenance would be caught up with in due time, and this answer provoked the only rift between his council and the borough council that was made manifest that evening, when a Tower Hamlets councillor declared that "It seems to me that management on GLC estates has totally broken down in this area." When another GLC tenant asked "How would you like to live in a flat with a bath in your kitchen?" there was a spontaneous cry from all around the hall, "We haven't got a bath." For worse off than the GLC tenants are those of the privately-owned tenement blocks like Great Eastern Buildings, slowly rotting away, with damp seeping through the walls and rats scampering around the refuse chutes. "Well," explained an officer of the council, "first we tried to negotiate with the landlords, then we slapped on a Compulsory Purchase Order, but then the Housing Act made the order invalid, so we have to apply for another." On the roof of Great Eastern Buildings I met two boys dismantling a pigeon-house they had built there. The landlord's agent had told them to take it down. Nearby the covers to the cold-water storage tanks had rotted away and the water-supply was open to the sky.

A second priority for residents was the question of the vagrant alcoholics. Mr. Bush reported that he had been successful in opposing the renewal of the licence of a wine and spirit shop, at the Thames Magistrates Court, but that the owners had appealed,

with the result that he needed to employ a barrister to oppose the appeal. Since this was in the interests of the resident population, would a pittance from the £125,000 pay his expenses? "No" was the reply, "the Home Office has to approve all spending." Another speaker declared that of twelve hostels for homeless alcoholics in London, five were in Tower Hamlets. "You can't expect Spitalfields to carry the can for society as a whole."

A third issue raised related to the touchy subject of the immigrants. "What is the GLC doing about the sale of rent books?" an officer was asked. "We carry out spot checks on overcrowding" was the oblique reply. In fact, that very week, the GLC had evicted a Bangladeshi family who have paid £450 for the rent book to the previous white tenants. "We ought to root out the people who sell their rent books to these poor unsuspecting immigrants," said John Hunte, the Tower Hamlets Community Relations officer.

A final local problem which brought danger and annoyance to residents and prevented effective street cleaning was the volume of traffic generated by local industry and the encroachment of the street market and of car parking associated with it. "What about blocking off streets to traffic during market hours?" asked Bill Kelly.

Indeed, as is frequently found when local opinion is sought in, for example, general improvement areas, what residents most wanted was an improvement of ordinary municipal services. "The real trouble with Spitalfields," someone said, "is that it is a place where anything goes." It's all right for market traders and their customers to park inches from someone's front door. It's all right to sling the rubbish anywhere, because the bins are overflowing anyway. It's all right for the mouldering slums to be infested with rats, and the open spaces to be taken over by the alcoholics. "What do you expect? That's one of the penalties of living in Stepney" replied a policeman to one irate resident.

Yet in Elder Street the gentrified 18th century houses change hands at £40,000, and at Spring Walk there are some of the most attractive new GLC houses in London. The zone of transition is trying to outgrow its historical reputation. Can that happen? Will it simply shift the problem somewhere else? What kind of miracle can be performed with £125,000 a year?

There is no dispute about many of the activities that should be supported: more facilities for the young, especially supervised

play-spaces; premises for the mothers of Wheeler House who set up the Quaker Street Club for their children, only to lose it when the church rented the building to someone else; some kind of community centre for the Bangladeshi population, and so on. But surely the Spitalfields Community Action Group is right: the cash would be more sensitively spent if it were put in the hands of the voluntary bodies, while the two councils concentrated on catching up with their own neglected statutory duties.

### 3. Self Help

#### SELF-BUILD:

#### BRIAR PATCH AND BUREAUCRACY

The Battle of Briar Patch has received such a lot of publicity that it is only necessary to reiterate very briefly the fact of the case. Leslie Kirby and his family were bombed out in 1940; they lived for a time in lodgings and in a caravan, but try as they might, they could not get a place of their own. So Mr. Kirby, a carpenter and a man of resource, bought himself a patch of land at Bracknell, Bucks., and with secondhand bricks and timber, and wood from the trees he cut down, and old picture frames for windows, he built a bungalow and settled down with his wife, her invalid mother and their two children. But, since the house was built without the sanction of the local council, and contravened the building by-laws and the Town and Country Planning Act, the council gave him notice that they intended to dismantle his house and sell the materials in order to pay for the demolition.

But the workmen sent to disconnect the electricity and water supply refused to do so, and one of the demolition men asked for his cards and quitted the job. Crowds gathered and prevented council officers from approaching the house, until forcibly removed by police. Eventually Mr. Kirby's garage and workshop were taken down, but then the demolition workers refused to move the furniture out of the house, and thus stopped the work from continuing. Meanwhile orders came from the Ministry of Town and Country Planning that the demolition was to be stopped

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From *Freedom*, 29 May, 1948.

—but for the solidarity of these workers, the reprieve would have been too late.

The alternative accommodation that the council offered was a standard army Nissen hut, 36 feet long and 16 feet wide—this for three adults (one bedridden) and two children. It is hard to imagine what sort of building by-laws would pass the Nissen hut and condemn Briar Patch.

The Bracknell bungalow is not, however, an isolated case. A Lancashire farmer at Askham-in-Furness, with a wife and baby, built a bungalow on his own land, having nowhere else to live. Since the land is scheduled for agricultural purposes, the Dalton Urban District Council proposed to demolish it. Well, there can be few farmers who do not live on their own land and, taking account of the fact that the biggest obstacle to increasing the number of people working on the land is the lack of houses, this proposal reaches the apex of stupidity and folly, especially when we recall that last week's *Freedom* reports that "only about one-tenth of the 36,000 new houses erected in rural areas have been taken by farm workers, mainly owing to the excessive rents charged".

Thus our responsible authorities, themselves incapable (as they are bound to be within our economic structure) of solving the housing problem, take punitive action against people with enough initiative and independence to solve it for themselves, and are only prevented by working-class solidarity and public outcry forcing the hand of a higher authority. At a time when 22,009 building operatives are unemployed, and architects are idle behind their drawing-boards, all that can be offered is a Nissen hut.

There are, of course, other issues involved in the Briar Patch dispute. No one really wants to see the growth of new colonies of shacks and shanties, but are not the authorities themselves the worst offenders in this respect—putting up groups of the flimsier varieties of "prefab" on all sorts of sites, whether suitable or not? The excuse, which has considerable justification, is that the extreme urgency of the present situation makes these temporary measures inevitable, but this applies with equal force to Briar Patch, and Mr. Kirby certainly doesn't intend his bungalow to be his permanent home.

And with regard to agricultural land, surely the worst offender is the government itself, through the demands of its service departments. The recent annual report of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England shows that the real disregards

of the Town and Country Planning requirements are the authorities concerned with the administration of the Acts and not individual homeless people. On what is happening in the way of development in Greater London the report expresses grave concern. It talks of the public being lulled into security and affirms that the growth of London's population and industry is greatest in the suburban ring and in the Green Belt. And the offenders, declares the report, are not the speculative builders, but those Ministries which are blind to anything but a narrow, short-term policy of providing houses and more production quickly, and certain great authorities who have learned nothing from the war, and who pursue old ways of local aggrandisement or house dumping on any available sites. What has happened in Greater London, the report submits, is a complete policy of drift—and drift in the wrong direction.

We heard a lot in the last few years about "organic planning" and "planning for human needs", but we have seen little of it in action. For that sort of planning is not born of Acts of Parliament, nor of By-laws; it rises "like a lark from the furrows" of a free people working together for the fulfilment of their daily needs and aspirations.

## BUILDING YOUR OWN HOUSE

There must be many of us with the ambition, more or less, to build our own home—not to be able to get a builder to do it for us, but actually to do it ourselves. To be able to create the entire dwellingplace however, is something few of us will actually be able to do—this side of a revolution. And yet, is it impossible? In Birmingham 50 workers in the Post Office factory are getting together to do just that—to build their own houses. The first to get the idea was the secretary of the factory's British Legion branch, members of which were browned-off with living in rooms and with in-laws. So they got together, fixed up for someone to teach them how to lay bricks, got an architect to design a bungalow, a design which was promptly corrected by the men's wives, found a site, fixed mortgages with a building society, put up £1,000 between them for equipment, sorted themselves into

From *Freedom*, 17 September, 1949.

gangs, elected their own foremen and got to work.

They have worked out their own "points" system to establish the order of possession, and the first two couples will soon be moving into brand-new three-bedroomed homes which will cost them £600 a piece. They have drawn up their own rules, including disciplinary ones to prevent slackening-off after a majority get housed, and are working three evenings a week and all day on Saturdays and Sundays.

We have always maintained that the housing shortage is artificial and could be cured by the direct action of the community. These 50 telephone mechanics, clerks and storemen are showing one thing that can be done with the necessary determination now.

## SIGNIFICANCE

### OF THE SELF-BUILD MOVEMENT

Talking on the radio last month, Mr. Fello Atkinson, the architect said, "It is a sign of the fearful complication of our times that building one's own house should seem like a good idea . . . The idea is certainly not new but is only unusual in modern, highly industrialised communities where each of us, except possibly farmers and sailors, tends to specialise in ever-narrowing fields to the exclusion and even ignorance of all others. The responsibility for housing has now largely passed to government, and there exists a complicated and rigid pattern of planning and building permits, regulations and standards, financing and subsidies. But in spite of this, groups of men are building their own houses in this country today; they have been doing so for some time, and they are building them successfully within this complex mechanism. And these self-build groups as they are called, are growing in number."

He went on to describe the activities of groups affiliated to the National Federation of Housing Societies. This called forth a letter from the secretary of a group, who wanted to draw attention to the 194 self-build groups affiliated to the London and National Self-Build Housing Association, and the Central Association, Birmingham, and to "the difficulties and heartbreak of other groups, already fully-trained, with considerable financial

resources, who have been ready to build for eighteen months, and who lack one thing only—the co-operation of their local authorities to grant the necessary permission for them to go ahead and build". The writer also paid tribute to the founders of the associations, who "without any prompting, and for no personal gain, have come forward and shown us, *for the first time in our lives, how to help ourselves*". The last phrase is why we believe the self-build movement to be so valuable and important.

## SELF-BUILD AND THE ARCHITECT

It's a sign of the times, isn't it, that while a decade ago, the National Building Agency was putting all its authority and apparent expertise into the campaign to persuade councils to adopt industrialised, system-built high-rise flats, its latest publication is a manual on self-build. (£2.00 from the NBA, or free to registered housing associations from the NFHA.)

Cynics might wonder whether the NBA is any better qualified to advise us on its new enthusiasm than on its old, but in this case it has had the advice of members of the working party on self-build housing of the National Federation of Housing Associations and of Colin Wadsworth, a former civil servant who, having built his own house, now earns a living by helping other people to do so too: a task he finds nerve-racking but rewarding.

For reasons which are easy to imagine the past year has seen a crescendo of interest in self-build housing. The Housing Act of 1974 which enabled the Housing Corporation to lend funds to self-build associations and to acquire sites for them, was the first legislative recognition of this method of providing houses. The NFHA has had a sharp increase in the volume of enquiries about how to do it, and there have been a number of sober and well-informed articles on this theme in the popular press by Diana Guyon, David Crawford and Robert Tyrell.

It is certainly the oldest form of house provision there is, and as John Turner is quick to point out, even today, "a third of the world's people house themselves with their own hands, sometimes in the absence of government and professional intervention, some-

From *Freedom*, 17 May, 1952.

From *The Architects' Journal*, 2 April, 1975.

times in spite of it," while in the United States owner-builders are responsible for 20 per cent of new single-family dwellings constructed annually. Scratch around in your own family tree and you will find a self-builder not very far back. My grandfather, a carpenter, built his own house, though I, a simple lad, refused to believe this since it looked like any other suburban villa. Last year I met a man who had helped his uncle build their house in Poland in the 1950s and had done the same thing in France when they had both emigrated. Arriving finally in this country he had been amazed to find that what he regarded as normal and virtuous, was here surrounded by a thicket of legal obstacles and by the deepest suspicion by public authorities who would see it as normal and virtuous for *them* to build houses and let them at "reasonable" rents of one-fifth of the economic rent.

There are two basic forms of self-build: first, that of the individual, assisted by family and friends, with whatever specialist help he can afford, and second, that of the self-build housing association in which a group of people, legally not fewer than seven, collaborate to build a group of houses, benefiting from whatever help their status as a registered friendly society and housing association gives them at the time. The first of these was set up at Brighton in 1949 and an optimistic guess would be that such societies have provided their members with 10,000 houses to date. How many have been individually built is anybody's guess.

A further kind of self-built house is, of course, the sub-standard shanty or shack, improved over time by its occupants—a form effectively outlawed by post-war planning and building legislation, though a growing body of opinion, including that of John Noble of the DOE Housing Directorate, sees the need for experiments in this kind of housing. Yet another variant is *ad hoc* rehabilitation. The conservation architect for Norwich told me about a man in that city whom he regards as "the last of the vernacular builders", who has found his *métier* in reconstructing old houses, and will rush into the planning department saying, "I've just picked up a couple of smashing double-hung sashes. Do you mind if I stick them in?"

Has the architect a role in self-build? Certainly I have met a number of architects who have built their own houses with varying degrees of assistance. They usually point shamefacedly to incomplete details and unfinished ends but are proof that shortcomings and imperfections for which you are yourself

responsible are infinitely more tolerable than those which are the responsibility of others. (This is in fact the unwritten Third Law of Housing.)

But should the architect in his professional capacity get involved with self-build groups? The trouble with "official" publications like the Self Build Manual is that they have to give an "official" view: no advice on how to cut corners, only stern warnings about the need for formal procedures, and for professional advice at every turn. It constantly stresses this, and specifies the services of a solicitor, of a qualified accountant as auditor (in accordance with the Friendly Societies Act), an architect and even a quantity surveyor.

The actual experience of self-build groups and the advice given unofficially is different. Robert Tyrell cites the view of an officer of the NBA: "An architect, he thinks, is not necessary, but can be extremely helpful in making the best of a site and ensuring compliance with official building standards and technical requirements." Most architect readers would agree that a full service to self-build groups at the standard RIBA scale would be grossly uneconomic from the architects' point of view, and would be seen as grossly excessive by the members. The case of the self-build housing association is another example of the kind of circumstance that calls for an architectural GP service of the kind envisaged by J. M. Richards and others.

One unfortunate effect of the NBA manual on the reader would be to convince him that there would be fewer headaches if he were to go it alone, rather than be a member of a group which had to impose punitive fines and so on, on those members suspected of not pulling their weight in man-hours. This was not the impression I got from members of self-build groups I have met, who assured me that working together had made them friends for life, but it is borne out by some of the interviews in the press. For example, Vic Watts of Tangerine Self-Build Housing Association, Colchester, having built his own house with the group, is embarking on a house for his mother, and proposes to do it himself "using hired helpers only for the jobs that are too big for one man". A common complaint is that "local authority officers don't want to know. If you want to do something out of the ordinary they try to fob you off, because it only means more work for them."

This is why a new profession has emerged, that of a facilitator, or fixer, for self-build associations. Colin Wadsworth's entry

into this field has been justified by the invaluable help and encouragement he has given to others, but it does point to one of the most worrying things about our tangle of legislative restrictions, the built-in preference of the authorities for doing deals with large-scale developers while holding at bay a small and insignificant group who simply want to house themselves.

There is no mention in the NBA manual, and you would hardly expect it, of the way in which self-build groups can benefit from the materials which come onto the market in a haphazard way from demolitions or from the bankruptcies which punctuate life in the building trade. Nor of the way in which a different approach to constructional design (I am thinking of course of the ideas and practice of people like Walter Segal) could really exploit the potential of self-build. And, of course, such approaches would make life even more difficult for applicants for loans and mortgages.

In fact, a great gulf exists between the existing theory and practice of self-build, and the imaginative architect's idea of what it could be, not to mention all those bright ideas floating around in the schools of architecture and in those innumerable "underground" manuals on homes, houses and shelter. The gap is there, because without any specific intention to do so, an absolute veto on innovation and experiment has been imposed by the sources of land, finance and permission to build: in other words by public authorities and institutional lenders. In the hard days to come this gap has got to be bridged.

## SELF-HELP HOUSING IN SOUTH AMERICA

The ordinary well-housed citizen is very ill-informed about other people's housing conditions here: small wonder that he knows or cares very little about housing in Latin America. What he does know he will have gleaned from the media of film and television. For instance, the recent BBC tv films on Latin America have shown him the superblocks at Caracas which were one of the less bizarre manifestations of the building activities initiated by the former Venezuelan dictator Perez Jimenez, as well as the utter hopelessness of rural life in Peru which the peasants are leaving in great numbers for the rubbish tips of the capital. Or

From *Anarchy*, January 1964.

he may have seen the film *Orfeu Negro*, in which case he will have grasped the fact that the city of Rio de Janeiro is bursting at the seams, and will realise why the former Brazilian dictator felt impelled to embark on *his* project for a new inland capital Brazilia, whose visitors, one imagines, escape from the official receptions and broad avenues, to the petrol-can shanty-towns on the outskirts where the building workers live, for a bit of local colour. The thoughtful recipient of these titbits of information may be curious about the less sensational aspects of the housing problem in the South American countries, and in particular about the ways in which people can exercise their own initiative to overcome their own problems.

John Turner, whose name will be familiar to some of our readers, first as one of the anarchists among the post-war generation of architectural students, and later as a furniture maker and contributor to *Freedom*, left Britain in 1957 with Kitty Turner and Pat Crooke, to work for various specialised agencies on community development and housing plans in Peru. He recently prepared a report on Dwelling Resources in South America which was published as a remarkable special number of the journal *Architectural Design* (August 1963). One of the articles in Turner's report tells us what happened to the spectacular "superblocks" at Caracas which were built between 1954 and 1958 to house 160,000 people, mostly recent immigrants from rural Venezuela:

"By the time the dictatorship finally collapsed the superblocks were in social chaos which, even now, has only been partially resolved. The incomplete and unoccupied apartments and many community buildings were invaded, controlled by gangs, the utilities and even the lifts broke down, the facilities were totally inadequate, the groups were often isolated by difficult communications, from the rest of the city, and, on top of these and many other difficulties the political situation made it extremely difficult to do anything at all."

Extensive social rehabilitation and community development projects were subsequently initiated, and "their success shows that the blocks can function well and suggests that the failure of social and financial planning, at least partly due to political interference, was the cause of the initial failure rather than the original concept." An account is also given of "aided self-help" rural housing in Venezuela carried out under the auspices of the anti-malarial division of the Public Health Ministry and of the work of the Instituto de Credito Territorial in Colombia and

its recent evolution from providing credit for middle-class housing to its present policy of giving priority of self-help plans by individual effort (*esfuerzo propio*) and mutual aid groups (*ayuda mutua*) which enable it to finance effectively and economically, housing for the "lower income groups" which could not benefit from previous schemes.

The description of a successful co-operative housing venture in Chile notes that "Theoretically, this type of limited co-operative is ideal in low-cost housing and in South America there have been frequent waves of enthusiasm for housing co-operatives ever since the forties. Although the first housing co-operatives were started in the first years of the century very little progress has been made anywhere until very recently: the waves always seem to have been followed by troughs of disillusion. The example described, after years of frustration, gained technical and financial assistance from newly formed savings and loan associations. Without these essential props, the author comments, would have destroyed the hope and faith of many families and throughout the continent; after years of patient effort and considerable sacrifice, the group would have failed and its failure would have destroyed the hope and faith of many families and wasted a large part of their savings. Pioneer co-operative groups are formed by a minority of the population which has done its best to act constitutionally, to buy land instead of taking the law into its own hands, and thereby avoiding the incomprehensible delays over apparently unnecessary and often illogical requirements. Only too often are these well-intentioned groups, often surprisingly well-organised and self-disciplined, made to look foolish by their lawless neighbours who just go ahead, take their land and build as best they can, often quite well and almost always improving their condition, with very little delay and of course, no red tape at all."

The moral of this is plain to see, and is exemplified by the experience from Lima, the capital of Peru, which is documented and illustrated with very striking photographs of the squatter settlements which are variously known as *barriadas* in Peru, *barrios* in Colombia, *callampas* in Chile, *ranchos* in Venezuela, *villas miserias* in Argentina, and *favelas* in Brazil. John Turner calls these "the un-aided self-help solution: a demonstration of the common people's initiative and the potential of their resources". And certainly if we are to discuss housing in Latin America, this is its most important aspect. The three authors

indicate this in their conclusions:

"In the seven years 1949 to 1956 the Peruvian government built 5,476 houses: less than 1 per cent of the housing deficit during these years, and at a unit cost that made repayment by the urban family impossible. And this in an exceptionally active period in government building work. During the same period no less than 50,000 families, the great majority from urban working class groups, took matters into their own hands and solved at least part of their housing and community development problems on their own initiative, and outside the established legal, administrative and financial superstructure. Official policy led, on the other hand, to an authoritarian imposition of public housing and, on the other, to an almost total neglect. Until 1958 no attempt was made in Peru to guide the common people's own contribution into local development programmes."

Some of their extraordinary photographs illustrate the Pampa de Comas, a squatter settlement with a population of about 30,000, part of the Caraballo group of *barriadas* which has a total population of about 100,000. "The initial invasion was carried out in 1957 by a group of families evicted from a slum in the centre of Lima in order to make room for an office and apartment block which, as a matter of fact, is still largely unlet." The entire development of Pampa de Comas was organised and carried out by spontaneously formed associations of lower-income blue- and white-collar workers and their families in much the same way as that described in William Mangin's fascinating case-history (reproduced in *Anarchy*, January 1964).

Mangin tells the story of Blas Quispe. His father was a Quechua-speaking Indian who lived on a *hacienda* in the mountain district of Paucartambo in Peru. Fortunado Quispe couldn't earn enough there to feed his seven children, so he signed on to work on a sugar plantation on the coast, and the family moved into a two-roomed adobe hut there. But the sugar plantation was buying machines to take the place of men and, by the time the oldest son, Blas, was eighteen and was due for a man's wage, he was told there was no work for him. He decided to go and seek his fortune in Lima and got a lift in a lorry to the edge of the valley where the city stands and then took a bus to the city centre. He had never seen so huge and wonderful a place; nor had he ever seen so many other poor people. He did as his father had suggested and sought out the secretary of a club called the Sons of Paucartambo, who found him a room in the

city and a job waiting in a hotel (where he got no pay, only tips).

There he met Carmen, who worked as a maid in the house next door and who had come to the city from the southern highland province of Ayacucho. Together they rented a tiny flat. The rent was high and they shared one water tap with ten other families. The paths between the buildings in the area where Carmen hung out the washing were less than one and a half meters wide. Sometimes even the washing got stolen. Blas and Carmen decided to join a Squatters' Association which was planning to join an invasion of empty land outside the city. At dawn one day, Blas and Carmen took a taxi (the driver was a friend) and loaded it with all their belongings and their children as well as poles and straw mats. They drove out to the new *barriada*, pegged out a plot fifteen by thirty metres, and built a wall of straw mats around it. They camped for the night inside their wall, and next morning the police came and pulled it down. So they built it up again, and this time the police did not come back.

In the next few months, with the help of friends, they replaced the straw mats with a wall of concrete blocks, strong enough to support a floor above, and Blas put down the payment of \$45 for a big, beautiful front door of cedar wood. Gradually he and his neighbours built a sewer and put in water pipes and wired up the house for electricity which they bought from another squatter who ran a diesel generator. Then they started to build a school. A few years and several children later, Blas built an upstairs for his house. By this time it was no longer a squatter shack, but a fully-equipped family house.

Margaret Grenfell, an English architect working privately for owner-builders in the *barriadas* of Lima describes the way in which these can be improved and completed more satisfactorily. Understandably the attitude of the house-owners to the terms on which lending agencies approve their houses for loans for completion is, "We have survived for ten years without their help all right; if they will not lend us money to roof our house as it is we will do it ourselves, even if it takes us another ten years." And an account of the effect of the legislation passed in 1961 for the "Remodelling, Sanitation and Legislation of the Marginal Developments" notes that "It is still too soon to say how long the average *barriada* dweller takes to build his house. His own estimate is about ten years for a properly finished one—with no credit or technical assistance. With credit and a

minimum of technical assistance he can build a house in six months, and finish the typical half-completed structure in two or three months."

This comparison illustrates the way in which the labour of the house-builder and his family is a substitute for the capital to which he is usually denied access, and the point is poignantly demonstrated by the detailed examination of a village artisan's self-built house in Southern Peru, built over the past thirty-two years by Senor Pedro Vizcarra, who in the early years would work on the house from 4 a.m. until he left for the factory where he worked, and again when he got home until it was dark, carrying stone for the foundations and walls on his back one mile to the site. The authors, commenting on the neglect of popular resources remark that "The form of the programme and works which the planner and architect propose must be the suitable vehicles for these resources. Refinement of designs and techniques that cannot be effectively used by these resources are a loss of time, money and effort: a loss often made more tragic when the real 'executive forces'—those of the people—are sowing the seeds of urban chaos, at immense cost and sacrifice, simply for lack of technical aid. It is terrible, and too common, to hear the complaint: 'Ingeniero, si nos habían dado las ayudas y orientaciones cuando las necesitábamos . . .' 'Mr. Engineer (or Architect) if only you had helped us when we most needed your knowledge . . .'" And they present the project illustrated in *Architectural Design*, to show *not* what architects and planners *are* doing in South America, but what they *should* be doing.

## POPULAR INITIATIVE IN HOUSING

*Architectural Design* returns to this subject in its August 1968 issue. The editors remark that in their previous study of squatter settlements in the "developing" countries they had found "contrary to much popular opinion, that these serve a very positive function for their residents" and they ask "what lessons we can draw from this work which are relevant to the very different situation in which architects work in the developed nations?"

"As we tried to answer the question set by the editors, we began with a shared perception that there are many positive aspects

From *Anarchy*, March 1969.

of the squatter environment, especially in the flexibility of the solution and its adaptability to the changing needs of families over time, and in the sense of autonomy and self-determination for both individuals and communities in making their own environment directly. In contrast, the world which we saw around us in the United States, with all its relative economic lavishness and technical virtuosity, often seemed outside the control of its inhabitants, even alien to men. It began to seem to us that there was here an underlying and more basic theme: the necessity of making the dwelling environment a human world. We found that we shared a sense that what makes an environment right for man is more than either its aesthetic qualities or its technical appropriateness, or even a combination of the two; that it is important also that an environment respond to us, that we have been able to make it ours. In this view, the means of making and controlling are tied together in experience with their physical product, and aesthetic judgements are and must be penetrated by human meanings and relevances. As a friend wrote to one of us, the point of view is that the world of art and the world of society are not separate, that there is only one world in which we all live and in which all our activities take place . . . our sense of any single activity can only be made rational by our sense of the whole. This requires us to look at the city, its neighbourhoods and its dwellings, as not simply artifacts and/or as the format of human activity, but as the vehicle and expression of our human life which, being human, is also communal, in the Greek sense, political."

John Turner, in his further study of the squatters of Lima, declares that "The squatter *barriada*-builder who chooses to invest his life's savings in an environment that he creates, forms himself in the process. The person, as the member of a family and of a local community, finds in the responsibilities and activities of home-building and local improvement the creative dialogue essential for self-discovery and growth. The *barriada* is ground for living that the housing units, marketed or allocated by mass-consumption society, does not provide." He contrasts the situation of the poor with their lot in more developed countries:

"The cities of the incipiently industrializing or transitional world, such as Lima, respond far more readily to the demands of the poor majority, than cities of the industrial or post-industrial world, like Chicago or New York, respond to their poor minorities. Because the poor are the majority in Lima and

because the government controls neither the material nor the human resources necessary for the satisfaction of essential housing needs, the poor must act for themselves—and if the official rules and regulations get in their way, these, along with any policemen who may be sent in to enforce them, are generally swept aside. Consequently, the very poor are able to find some corner for their private life, even if it's only a temporary shack in one of the interstices of the city—on an unguarded lot, in a ravine or even under a bridge. And the somewhat less poor are able to choose between renting one or two tenement rooms and squatting on the periphery. The urban poor in wealthy and highly institutionalised mass-consumption society do not have these freedoms. At best, like the Algerian and Portuguese immigrants to Paris, they are able to set up very poor *bidonvilles* on the edge of the city; more commonly, like the ghetto inhabitants of the United States cities, the poor can only rent tenements, from slumlords or from public housing authorities. There they must stay until they can make the far higher grade of suburbia in one leap—unless, of course, they are an ethnically discriminated minority in which case their environment will hold them down for ever, or until they burn it down."

And in a telling assertion of the libertarian significance of dweller control, Turner declares, "The man who would be free must build his own life. The existential value of the *barriada* is the product of three freedoms: the freedom of community self-selection; the freedom to budget one's own resources and the freedom to shape one's own environment." And he concludes that "the mass of the urban poor in cities like Lima are able to seek and find improvement through home-ownership (or *de facto* possession) when they are still very poor by modern standards is certainly the main reason for their optimism. If they were trapped in the inner cities, like so many of the North American poor, they too would be burning instead of building. The mass-designed, mass-produced environments for an increasingly homogenized market of mass-consumers are no more than assemblies of material goods devoid of existential meaning. They are not the product of dialogue. Decisions are made for a producer's market by those themselves bound by highly institutionalized norms and procedures. The occupant buys or rents a ready-made unit in much the same way as he gets his motor car or tv set—and if it is a flat or in a tightly controlled subdivision, he can do little more with his house than he can with the other manufactured

'goods' essential to his way of life. The intense dialogue that takes place between squatters planning an invasion, and the continuing dialogue of its development and administration are, with rare exceptions, totally lacking in the modern housing process."

Other contributors develop Turner's theme in its application to the cities of the United States. What about its applications in Britain?

## THE PITSEA-LAINDON STORY: SOME LESSONS FROM SHANTY-TOWN

From what has been said tonight by Paul Oliver about shelter in society, by Nick Houghton about the growth of a *barriada* in Lima, by Pat Crooke about squatter settlements in other parts of the third world, by Geoffrey Payne about Delhi and by David Etherton about the Mathare Valley, Kenya, it will have become clear to you that the poor of the poor countries—with some obvious exceptions—have a freedom that the poor of the rich world cities have lost. Three freedoms in fact, in John Turner's words: "the freedom of community self-selection, the freedom to budget one's own resources and the freedom to shape one's own environment". In the rich world the choices have been pre-empted by the power of the state with its comprehensive law-enforcement agencies and its institutionalised welfare agencies. In the rich world, as Habraken puts it, "Man no longer houses himself: he is housed."

Now we know, don't we, why these freedoms are not open to the poor in the rich countries? Every bit of land belongs to someone, and that someone has the law firmly on his side. Building regulations, planning legislation are rigidly enforced, unless you happen to be a developer who can hire architects and negotiators shrewd enough to find a way round them or to do a deal with the authorities.

In looking for parallels to the case-histories we have heard tonight, what exactly are we looking for? If it is for examples

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Contribution to the Symposium on *Barriadas* and Squatter Settlements at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London on 23 May, 1972, partly printed in the *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* for February 1974.

of rule-breaking, so far as the sacred rights of property are concerned, we have examples all through our history. If you go back far enough all our ancestors must have been squatters, and there have continually been movements in this country's past to assert people's right to their share of the land. In the 17th century a homeless person could apply to the Quarter Sessions who with the consent of the township concerned could grant him permission to build a house, with a small garden, on the village's common land. The Digger Movement during the Commonwealth asserted this right at George's Hill near Weybridge in Surrey, and Cromwell's troops burnt down their houses. There must have been lots of unrecorded instances during the enormous expansion of towns during the industrial revolution. After all, if you were living in a house without title or rent, the last thing you would do would be to advertise the fact.

But I don't want to talk about the significance of our own squatters' movement and the occupation of existing buildings. Instead I want to look at a self-built community. Just as the squatter settlements of the Third World have been stigmatised as slums (which in some cases they are) and we have had to wait for people like Pat Crooke and John Turner to alter our perception of them by pointing to their constructive achievements and their enormous value for their inhabitants, so it is with the invisible settlements or shanty-towns of this country, whose existence has hardly been recognised officially here, and then only to see them as a mess to be cleared up.

These have existed in many parts of the country, and the particular one I want to discuss is one of the Essex "plotlands".

The building of the London-Tilbury-Southend Railway in 1888 coincided with a period of agricultural depression, and several farmers around Pitsea and Laindon in Essex sold to an astute land agency which divided the land into plots for sale. They advertised these as holiday or retirement retreats and organised excursion trains from West Ham and East Ham at the London end of the line, with great boozy jaunts to the country (large hotels were built at the stations), and in the course of the outings plots of land were auctioned. Some people returned home without realising that they were now landowners and these remained undeveloped, or perhaps were built on without title by someone else.

In the period up to the end of the nineteen-thirties other agents or the farmers themselves sold plots in the area, sometimes for

as little as £3 for a 20-foot frontage. A lot of ex-servicemen, dreaming of a good life on a place of their own sank their gratuities after the First World War in small-holdings (for which there could hardly be a less satisfactory soil than that around Pitsea) or in chicken farming. Most of them soon failed: they lost their money but they had some kind of cabin on the site, and the return fare from Laindon to Fenchurch Street was 1s. 2d. in 1930. The kind of structures people built ranged from the typical inter-war speculative builder's detached house or bungalow, to converted buses or railways coaches, with a range of army huts, beach huts and every kind of timber-framed shed, shack or shanty.

During the Second World War, with very heavy bombing in East London, especially the dockland boroughs of East Ham and West Ham, many families evacuated themselves or were bombed out, and moved in permanently to whatever foothold they had in the Pitsea, Laindon and Vange districts, with the result that at the end of the war the area had a settled population of 25,000.

There were some 8,500 existing dwellings, over 6,000 of them unsewered. There were 75 miles of grass track roads, mains water in built-up areas only with standpipes in the roads elsewhere. There was no surface water drainage apart from ditches and old agricultural drains. Only fifty per cent of dwellings had mains electricity. There were about 1,300 acres of completely waste land of which 50 per cent had no known owner. The average density was 6 persons to the acre. Of the 8,500 dwellings, 2,000 were of brick and tile construction to Housing Act standards, 1,000 were of light construction to the same standard, 5,000 were chalets and shacks and 500 were described as derelict, though probably occupied. The average rateable value was £5.

In 1946 the New Towns Act was passed and various places were designated by the government as sites for New Towns. In many cases there was intense local opposition, not only from residents and landowners but also from the local authorities. In the case of the place we are considering, and Basildon was unique among the New Towns in this, the Minister was petitioned by the Essex County Council and by the local council to designate the area as a New Town. They were joined by the County Borough Councils of West Ham and East Ham who saw the place as a natural overspill town for their boroughs—many of whose former citizens were now living there. The argument was that there was no other way of financing the infra-structure of essential municipal services. At the first round the application

was turned down. Harlow was chosen as the first Essex New Town and there was talk of Ongar as the second. After a further delegation to the Minister, Basildon was accepted.

The New Town was planned to start from a nucleus at the village of Basildon itself, expanding eastwards and westwards to incorporate Laindon and Pitsea. The first general manager, Brigadier W. G. Knapton, set out his policy in 1953 thus: "Any solution which includes the wholesale demolition of sub-standard dwellings cannot be contemplated. However inadequate, every shack is somebody's home, probably purchased freehold with hard-earned savings, and as often as not the area of land within the curtilage is sufficient to provide garden produce and to house poultry, rabbits, and even pigs. To evict the occupier and to re-accommodate him and his family in a corporation house, even on such favourable terms as the Act may permit, will probably cause not only hardship, but bitter feelings. The old must be absorbed into the new with the least detriment to the former and the greatest advantage to the latter."

His successor, Mr. Charles Boniface, adopted the same humane and sensible attitude. He remarked that "the planners' task here is like a jigsaw puzzle, with the new fitting into the old instead of being superimposed upon and obliterating it". This is in fact the policy which has been followed, and the grid-iron pattern of the grass-track roads has been incorporated into the fully-developed new town plan. Mr. Boniface has always maintained (against some opposition) that "existing residents and allotment owners have as many rights as incomers or the corporation itself".

Let us zoom in on one particular street in the Laindon end of Basildon. It probably has a greater variety of housing types than any street in Britain. It starts on the right with two late Victorian villas—a sawn-off bit of terrace housing stuck there hopefully when the railway was first built. On the left is a detached house with a porch embellished with Doric wooden columns, like something in the Deep South of the United States. Then there are some privately-built houses of the 1960s, and next a wooden cabin with an old lady leaning over the gate—a First World War army hut which grew. On the other side of the road is some neat Development Corporation Housing: blue brick, concrete tilehanging and white trim. Here is a characteristic improved shanty with imitation stone quoins formed in cement rendering at the corners of the pebbledash. Most of the old houses

have some feature in the garden exemplifying Habraken's remarks about the passion to create and embellish. This one has a fountain, working. This one has a windmill about five feet high painted black and white like the timber and asbestos house it adjoins. The sails are turning. Here's one with a pond full of goldfish.

And now we see an immaculate vegetable garden with an old gentleman hoeing his onions. He was a leather worker from Kennington, who bought the place 43 years ago for week-ends and then retired down here. No, he wasn't the first occupier, who was a carpenter from Canning Town who bought three 20-foot plots for £18 in 1916, giving a site 60 ft. by 140 ft. In the post-1918 period when, according to Mr. Syrett, the present owner, the banks were changing their interiors from mahogany to oak, the carpenter brought down bits and pieces of joinery from Fenchurch Street and built his dream bungalow. After Mr. Syrett had bought it, it was burnt down except for the present kitchen and Mr. Syrett himself built the present timber-framed house. Later he had it rendered, and although he is now 85, he has been making improvements ever since. For example he has recently cut out the mullions of his 1930-type windows to make them more like the ones in the Development Corporation houses opposite.

I showed him a description of the area as a former "vast pastoral slum". He denied this of course, remarking that most people came down here precisely to get away from the slums. But what was it like before the road was made up? Well, you had to order your coal in the summer as the lorry could never get down the road in wintertime. But there was a pavement. "People used to get together with their neighbours to buy cement and sand to make the pavement all the way along the road." Street lighting? No, there was none. "Old Granny Chapple used to take a hurricane lamp when she went to the Radiant Cinema in Laindon." Transport? "Well, a character called Old Tom used to run a bus from Laindon Station to the Fortune of War public house. And there were still horses and carts down here in those days. They used to hold steeplechases on the hill where the caravan site is now." In the same road lived Mr. Budd, who died last year at 97. He was a bricklayer by trade and every time he had a new grandchild would add a room to his house.

Mr. and Mrs. Syrett's house is immaculate—large rooms with all the attributes of suburban comfort. The house was connected to the sewer and electricity mains in the 40s and got gas 15 years

ago. The Urban district council made up the road under the Private Street Works Act, charging £60 in road charges. The road was recently made up again to a higher standard by the Development Corporation. The rates are £12 a half year, and as old age pensioners they got a rate rebate.

They live happily within their pension, they assured me. No rent to pay, some fruit and vegetables from the garden and the greenhouse. It is a matter of pride for them that they are not obliged to apply for supplementary benefits which they regard as scrounging. It is quite obvious that Mr. Syrett's real investment for his old age was this one-time substandard bungalow which today has all the same amenities and conveniences as the homes of his neighbours. The truth of this can be seen if you look in the estate agents' windows in Pitsea, where houses with the same kind of origin are advertised at prices similar to those asked for the spec. builders' houses of the same period. The significant thing is that their original owners and builders would never have qualified as building society mortgagees in the inter-war years, any more than people with equivalent incomes would today. The integration of shacksville into new development has been outstandingly successful in Basildon but the same upgrading of dwellings and improvement in facilities happens in the course of time anywhere—further down the line at Canvey Island for example—without benefit of New Town finance. What the New Town mechanism *has* done of course is to draw the sporadic settlement together into an Urban entity and provide non-commuting jobs through the planned introduction of industry. Pitsea and Laindon could be called do-it-yourself New Towns, later legitimised by official action.

But the cheap, substandard unfinished kind of development that gives the underprivileged a place of their own has ceased to be available. In the 1930s, aesthetic critics deplored this kind of development as "bungaloid growth" and so on, though the critics themselves had a great deal more freedom of manoeuvre in buying themselves a place in the sun. It is interesting that Sir Patrick Abercrombie in the Greater London Plan of 1944 said, "It is possible to point with horror to the jumble of shacks and bungalows on the Laindon Hills and Pitsea. This is a narrow-minded appreciation of what was as genuine a desire as created the group of lovely gardens and houses at Frensham and Bramshott." This may be obvious today, but it was unusually perceptive in the climate of opinion then.

What in fact the pioneers of Pitsea-Laindon (or any self-build housing group) were able to do is exactly what the squatters of South America do: to turn their labour into capital over time.

Our building regulations and our planning legislation, as well as the inflation of land values, have made sure that there won't be any more Pitsea-Laindons.

But imagine we were a poor country, and like those poor countries which had made a realistic assessment of resources, and had moved from persecuting the homeless to adopting the policy of site-and-services, which can be seen in some South American and African countries—the provision of minimum services for self-build housing. And suppose we applied this, not to green field sites, but to the acres of dereliction in urban districts, where the municipal zeal to erase the slums has outstripped the capacity to rebuild. Imagine that the corporation provided a road, a plot, party walls and a service core of plumbing bath, basin, wc, sink, and ring-main terminal, as our equivalent of the site-and-services nucleus, and then encouraged people to do their own thing. Self-build housing societies would spring up, voluntary effort would aid those unable to help themselves, the homeless and unemployed could make homes and make jobs, and in a decade we would see a self-made community, freed from the awful dependency we inflict on the municipal tenant (one-third of the families at Thamesmead are behind with the rent) and from the pauperisation we inflict on the beneficiaries of welfare.

It is easy to envisage the howl that would go up if anyone had the temerity to take this suggestion seriously. What about Parker Morris, what about the price of land, what about the Unions, what an absurdity in the age of system building, what a smack in the eye for all those hard-won improvements in standards, and finally, what an insult to the poor and needy! And yet, when you think of the way that our intractable "housing problem" is really a poverty problem, when you think of the way we have made it possible for the homeless to improve their own situation, when you think of the untapped human energy that could be turned into capital asset, when you think of the way in which the site-and-services householders could be enabled to own the value of their site improvements in the way that we owner-occupiers take for granted, and when you think of the manifest pride and pleasure revealed as much by the old inhabitants of Pitsea-Laindon as by anyone else who has experienced "dweller

control of the housing process", you can see that it would be not only a rational but a desirable experiment.

## NOTES ON ANARCHIST CITIES

Governments are invariably based in cities: whoever heard of a nation ruled from a village? Very often they actually build cities to house themselves: New Delhi, Canberra, Ottawa, Washington, Chandigar and Brasilia are examples. And isn't it significant that the visitor who wants to sample the real life of a place has to escape from the city of the bureaucrats and technocrats in order to do so. He has to go ten miles from Brasilia for example, to the Cidade Libre (Free Town) where the building workers live. They built the "City for the Year 2000" but are too poor to live there, and in their own home-made city, "a spontaneous wild west shanty-town life has arisen, which contrasts with the formality of the city itself, and which has become too valuable to be destroyed".

Anarchism—the political philosophy of a non-governmental society of autonomous communities—does not at first sight seem to address itself to the problems of the city at all. But there is in fact a stream of anarchist contributions to urban thought that stretches from Kropotkin to Murray Bookchin historically, and from John Turner to the International Situationists ideologically. A lot of the people who might help us evolve an anarchist philosophy of the city would never think of trying because in spirit, though less often in practice, they have abandoned the city.

Particularly in Britain, the most highly urbanised country in the world, we have for centuries nurtured a myth of rural bliss—a myth cherished by people all across the political spectrum. Raymond Williams in his book *The Country and the City* has shown how all through history this myth has been fed into literature, always placing the lost paradise of rural bliss in some past period. And E. P. Thompson comments that what is wrong with the myth is that it has been "softened, prettified, protracted, and then taken over by the city dwellers as major point from

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which to criticise industrialism. Thus it became a substitute for the utopian courage of imagining what a true community, in an industrial city, might be—indeed of imagining how far community may have already been attained.”

Like Williams, he sees this as a debilitating situation: “a continuous cultural haemorrhage, a loss of rebellious blood, draining away now to Walden, now to Afghanistan, now to Cornwall, now to Mexico, the emigrants from cities solving nothing in their own countries, but kidding themselves that they have somehow opted out of contamination by a social system of which they are themselves the cultural artifacts”. All those merry peasants and shepherdesses of the pastoral dream are now, they point out, “the poor of Nigeria, Bolivia, Pakistan”.

And the paradox is that the rural poor of the Third World are flocking to the cities in vast numbers. If you want examples of anarchist cities in the real world today, in the sense of large-scale human settlements resulting from popular direct action and not on governmental action, it is to the Third World you would have to turn. In Latin America, Asia and Africa, the enormous movement of population into the big cities during the last two decades has resulted in the growth of huge peripheral squatter settlements around the existing cities, inhabited by the “invisible” people who have no official urban existence. Pat Crooke points out that cities grow and develop on two levels; the official, theoretical level, and that the majority of the population of many Latin American cities are unofficial citizens with a popular economy outside the institutional financial structure of the city.

One way of reducing the pressure on these exploding cities, would be to improve life in villages and small towns. But that would demand revolutionary changes in land tenure, and on starting small-scale labour-intensive industries, and in dramatically raising farm incomes. Until that happens, people will always prefer to take a chance in the city rather than starve in the country. The big difference from the explosion of urbanism in 19th century Britain is that then industrialisation preceded urbanisation, while today the reverse is true. The official view of the shanty-towns of the Third World is that they are breeding-grounds for every kind of crime, vice, disease, social and family disorganisation. But John Turner, the anarchist architect who has done more than most people to change the way we perceive such settlements, remarks:

“Ten years of work in Peruvian *barriadas* indicates that such a

view is grossly inaccurate: although it serves some vested political and bureaucratic interests, it bears little relation to reality . . . Instead of chaos and disorganisation, the evidence instead points to highly organised invasions of public land in the face of violent police opposition, internal political organisation with yearly local elections, thousands of people living together in an orderly fashion with no police protection or public services. The original straw houses constructed during the invasions are converted as rapidly as possible into brick and cement structures with an investment totalling millions of dollars in labour and materials. Employment rates, wages, literacy, and educational levels are all higher than in central city slums (from which most *barriada* residents have escaped) and higher than the national average. Crime, juvenile delinquency, prostitution and gambling are rare, except for petty thievery, the incidence of which is seemingly smaller than in other parts of the city.”

What an extraordinary tribute to the capacity for mutual aid of poor people defying authority. The reader who is familiar with Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* is bound to be reminded of his chapter in praise of the mediaeval city, where he observes that “Wherever men had found, or expected to find, some protection behind their town walls, they instituted their *co-jurations*, their *fraternities*, their *friendships*, united in one common idea, and boldly marching towards a new life of mutual support and liberty. And they succeeded so well that in three or four hundred years they had changed the very face of Europe.” Kropotkin is not a romantic adulator of the free cities of the middle ages, he knows what went wrong with them, and of their failure to avoid an exploitive relationship with the peasantry. But modern scholarship supports his interpretation of their evolution. Walter Ullman for example remarks that they “represent a rather clear demonstration of entities governing themselves” and that “In order to transact business, the community assembled in its entirety . . . the assembly was not ‘representative’ of the whole, but was the whole.”

This implies a certain size and scale of communities, and Kropotkin again, in his astonishingly up-to-date *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, argues on technical grounds for dispersal, for the integration of agriculture and industry, for (as Lewis Mumford puts it) “a more decentralised urban development in small units, responsive to direct human contact, and enjoying both urban and rural advantages”. Kropotkin's contemporary Ebenezer

Howard, in *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* asked himself the simple question: how can we get rid of the grimness of the big city and the lack of opportunities in the country (which drives people to the city)? How on the other hand can we keep the beauty of the country and the opportunities of the city? His answer was not only the garden city, but what he called the *social city*, the network of communities. The same message comes from Paul and Percy Goodman in *Communitas: means of livelihood and ways of life* where the second of their three paradigms, the The New Commune is what Professor Thomas Reiner calls "a polynucleated city mirroring its anarcho-syndicalist premises". And the same message comes again in Leopold Kohr's dazzling essay *The City as Convivial Centre* where he finds the good metropolis to be "a polynuclear federation of cities" just as his city is a federation of squares.

And like Kropotkin too, the *Blueprint for Survival* sees the goal as "a decentralised society of small communities where industries are small enough to be responsive to each community's needs". And long before the energy crisis hit people's consciousness, Murray Bookchin in his essay "Towards a Liberatory Technology" (which I published in *Anarchy* in 1967 and is now in his book *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*) argued the energy case for the polynuclear city:

"To maintain a large city requires immense quantities of coal and petroleum. By contrast, solar energy (from the sun), wind power and tidal energy reach us mainly in small packets. Except for great dams and turbines, the new devices seldom provide more than a few thousand kilowatt-hours of electricity. It is hard to believe that we will ever be able to design solar collectors that can furnish us with the immense blocks of electric power produced by a giant steam plant; it is equally difficult to conceive of a battery of wind turbines that will provide us with enough electricity to illuminate Manhattan Island. If homes and factories are heavily concentrated, devices for using clean sources of energy will probably remain mere playthings; but if urban communities are reduced in size and widely spread over the land, there is no reason why these devices cannot be combined to provide us with all the amenities of an industrial civilisation. To use solar, wind and tidal power effectively, the giant city must be dispersed. A new type of community, carefully tailored to the nature and resources of a region, must replace the sprawling urban belts of today."

A quite different line of anarchist urban thought is presented

in Richard Sennett's *The Uses of Disorder: personal identity and city life*. Several threads of thought are woven together in this book. The first is a notion the author derives from the psychologist Erik Erikson, that in adolescence men seek a purified identity to escape from pain and uncertainty, and that true adulthood is found in the acceptance of diversity and disorder. The second is that modern American society freezes men in the adolescent posture—a gross simplification of urban life in which, when rich enough, people escape from the complexity of the city to private family circles of security in the suburbs—the purified community. The third is that city planning as it has been conceived in the past, with techniques like zoning and the elimination of "non-conforming users", has abetted this process, especially by projecting trends into the future as a basis for present energy and expenditure. "Professional planners of highways, of redevelopment housing, of inner-city renewal projects have treated challenges from displaced communities or community groups as a threat to the value of their plans rather than as a natural part of the effort at social reconstruction." What this really means, says Sennett, is that planners have wanted to take the plan, the projection in advance, "as more 'true' than the historical turns, the unforeseen movements in the real time of human lives".

His prescription for overcoming the crisis of American cities is a reversal of these trends, for "outgrowing a purified identity". He wants cities where people are *forced* to confront each other: "There would be no policing, nor any other form of central control, of schooling, zoning, renewal, or city activities that could be performed through common community action, or, even more importantly through direct, nonviolent conflict in the city itself." Nonviolent? Yes, because Sennett claims that the present modern affluent city is one in which aggression and conflict are denied outlets other than violence, precisely because of the lack of personal confrontation. (Cries for law and order are greatest when communities are most isolated from other people in the city.) The clearest example, he suggests, of the way this violence occurs "is found in the pressures on police in modern cities. Police are expected to be bureaucrats of hostility resolution" but "a society that visualises the lawful response to disorder as an impersonal, passive coercion only invites terrifying outbreaks of police rioting". Whereas the anarchist city that he envisages, "pushing men to say what they think about each other in order to forge some mutual pattern of compatibility", is not

a compromise between order and violence, but a wholly different way of living in which people wouldn't have to choose between the two.

And are cities going to change? They have to because they are collapsing, replies Murray Bookchin in a book recently published in America *The Limits of the City*. The cities of the modern world are breaking down, he declares, under sheer excess of size and growth. "They are disintegrating administratively, institutionally, and logistically; they are increasingly unable to provide the minimal services for human habitation, personal safety, and the means for transporting goods and people . . . Even where cities have some semblance of formal democracy, "almost every civic problem is resolved not by action that goes to its social roots, but by legislation that further restricts the rights of the citizen as an autonomous being and enhances the power of super-individual agencies."

Nor can the professionals help: "Rarely could city planning transcend the destructive social conditions to which it was a response. To the degree that it turned in upon itself as a specialised profession—the activity of architects, engineers and sociologists—it too fell within the narrow division of labour of the very society it was meant to control. Not surprisingly, some of the most humanistic notions of urbanism come from amateurs who retain contact with the authentic experiences of people and the mundane agonies of metropolitan life."

He's right. Ebenezer Howard was a short-hand writer and Patrick Geddes was a botanist. But the particular bunch of amateurs who, for Murray Bookchin, point the way are the young members of the counterculture: "Much has been written about the retreat of dropout youth to rural communes. Far less known is the extent to which ecologically-minded counter-cultural youth began to subject city planning to a devastating review, often advancing alternative proposals to dehumanising urban 'revitalisation' and 'rehabilitation' projects . . ."

For the countercultural planners "the point of departure was not the pleasing object or the 'efficiency' with which it expedited traffic, communications and economic activities. Rather, these new planners concerned themselves primarily with the relationship of design to the fostering of personal intimacy, many-sided social relationships, nonhierarchical modes of organisation, communistic living arrangement and material independence from the market economy. Design, here, took its point of departure not from

abstract concepts of space or a functional endeavour to improve the status quo but from an explicit critique of the status quo and a conception of the free human relationships that were to replace it. The design elements of a plan followed from radically new social alternatives. The attempt was made to replace hierarchical space by *liberated space*."

They were, in fact, rediscovering the *polis*, reinventing the *commune*. Now Murray Bookchin knows that the countercultural movement in the US has subsided from its high point of the 1960s, and he inveighs against the crude political rhetoric which was the next fashion. "Far more than the flowers of the mid-sixties, the angry clenched fists of the late sixties were irrelevant in trying to reach an increasingly alarmed and uncomprehending public." But he insists that certain demands and issues raised are imperishable. The call for "new, decentralised communities based on an ecological outlook that unites the most advanced features of urban and rural life" is not going to die out again because of the harsh fact that "few choices are left today for the existing society".

## DEAR MR. CROSLAND . . .

In your speech at Brighton on October 30 you raised, very tentatively, the question of housing standards. Are they too high? Can we cut them to speed up the production of housing, or to make the cash go further? Casting doubt on the validity of housing standards usually happens on the Tory right ("are we pampering the poor?") or on the anarchist left (John Turner's observation that the important thing about housing is not what it *is* but that it *does* in people's lives). In mainstream Labour Party circles the Parker Morris standards are a sacred cow, and the fact that you raise this issue shows how desperate you are. This is no wonder since last year's output of houses in both the public and private sectors was the lowest for decades, and now the brickworks are cutting production "for lack of demand" so that next year, predictably, the stumbling block will be a brick famine.

This open letter to the Secretary of State for the Environment was printed in *Freedom*, 9 November, 1974 and in *The Architects' Journal*, 13 November, 1974.

You said "We face a short term emergency situation—cannot we provide more homes, more quickly, more cheaply, at least for a five year period while the emergency is still with us?" And you asked your Department to "conduct an urgent review of the problem and the options open to us" declaring that "I find our present housing situation so harmful, so intolerable, that I now place them firmly on the agenda for public and informed discussion by the experts."

But the very language you used shows that you have *not* understood the issues. Firstly this is not a short-term crisis but a permanent characteristic of our kind of society, and secondly that the "experts" are the last people from whom to seek solutions: look at the ones they have given us in the past. Wasn't it the experts who gave us high-rise housing and the intolerable problems it has bequeathed us? Wasn't it the experts who bulldozed the humble homes of every inner city district in a blitzkrieg policy of raze-and-rise, where the urge to raze has outstripped the financial capacity to rise?

You have fallen into the same trap as Lord Goodman who, as chairman of the Housing Corporation and the National Building Agency, has for the last 18 months been gaining applause for his remark that "it is only in a society where we have a government working night and day in our behalf that housing problems are insoluble," but who, when he came to give his Dimpleby Lecture to a vast audience on TV could only ask for a more rapid turnover of the correspondence on official desks and "the establishment of a single authority having total autonomy".

You and he see the homeless, the ill-housed and overcrowded, and the newly-weds just coming up for membership of the Housing Shortage Club, as the inert objects, the raw material of policy, waiting to be processed by the Housing Problems Industry. But suppose we turn the whole subject upside down and assume that ordinary people are the makers, rather than the victims of policy. We can then see a totally new spectrum of opportunities and possibilities, some of which the experts dismiss as irrelevant, some of which they regard as subversive, and some of which they know nothing at all about.

Let me spell out eight of these alternative approaches:

1. The idea that a house is a fully-finished, fully-serviced object right from the start belongs to a very small part of the world and a very small stretch of our own history. All through

history homes have started humbly and have been enlarged, improved and adapted over time. Today in the exploding cities of Latin America, what begins as a straw shack becomes in about fifteen years a fully serviced suburban house, through the efforts of its occupier, who, starting with nothing, invests his own energy, income and ingenuity in his home. I could take you to houses in the Essex "plotlands" started before such efforts were ruled out of court by our building regulations, public health and planning legislation, where exactly the same phenomenon could be seen. But for us, seeing housing as a commodity rather than an activity, a house is either complete from the moment of occupation or it is illegal. If only we were a poor nation we would see the absurdity of this. Suppose we forget that we are rich and try out a site-and-services approach to housing, not in Lima but in the man-made wastes of inner Liverpool, not in Dar-es-Salaam but in Dockland. Provide a service core: kitchen sink, bath, WC, and ring-main connection (this is where prefabrication really would be useful), put up some party walls (to overcome the fire-risk objection), and you will have long queues of families anxious to build the rest of the house for themselves, or get their brother-in-law or some moonlighting tradesman or the Community Industry to do it for them, within the party walls. Such a carnival of construction would have important spin-offs in other branches of the social problems industry: ad hoc jobs for unemployed teenagers, learning a trade for ROSLA kids and so on.

2. In the aftermath of the First World War, when syndicalist and guild socialist ideas were in the air, guilds of building workers tendered for and built large municipal housing jobs, with the active support of Christopher Addison, the Minister of Health (then responsible for housing) and of Raymond Unwin, the very distinguished housing architect who was at the time chief architect for the Ministry, as well as the financial support of the CWS Bank.

Large numbers of houses were built, but the whole Building Guild episode was cut short by the mini-slump of the early twenties, the "Geddes Axe" of cuts in spending and by the antipathy of the next Minister Sir Alfred Mond. Why is such an enterprise, with such support unthinkable today? What is so holy about Wimpeys or MacAlpines? Why can't we, instead of conducting a phoney crusade against The Lump, give it a twist in emphasis and motivation, and use worker-controlled building

guilds as one strategy for getting house-building going again. (In another field it has been realised that instead of persecuting illegal child-minders, we should provide them with training and opportunities. Precisely the same approach is applicable to lump labour in the building industry.)

3. We have in London and elsewhere the extraordinary situation that local authorities and housing associations are buying up houses in the open market, and are then allowing them to stand empty for months and even years awaiting conversion. One housing association approached the National Building Agency for a report on how they could overcome the embarrassing bottleneck between acquisition and occupation. They were rewarded with a load of professional verbiage: a sledgehammer to crack a nut. Contrast this experience with that of a group of seven students from the Architectural Association School of Architecture. Deciding, as part of their self-education, that they should demystify the contracting process, they formed themselves into a partnership and tendered for a conversion job for a well-known housing association. Deciding that the specification and bill of quantities were really a matter of guesswork since no-one really knew what work was involved until they stripped off the slates and lifted the floorboards, they guessed at an estimate which turned out to be the lowest so they got the job. They financed their operations without difficulty by going for an overdraft to the same bank as their clients, did the conversion rapidly and economically, had no difficulty at all in getting the specialist labour for the bits they couldn't do themselves, and finished critical of the scheme they were working to, realising that discussions between an ad hoc building group like themselves and the potential occupants of the flats would result in a quicker, cheaper job.

4. Squatters in North London boroughs like Camden and Islington have also set about restoring and improving houses, using voluntary labour and unorthodox materials, at an infinitely lower cost and much more rapidly than the councils could. John Pollard has provided calculations to show that not only are they housing people at no cost to the exchequer, but that the failure of the councils to act on their own behalf is losing them a phenomenal sum in treasury grants (£1,200,000 he claims in the case of Camden) and is also losing precious years of house-occupation for people on their waiting list.

5. Can't we learn another lesson from the squatters in the current case of Sumner House in the London Borough of

Tower Hamlets? This is a block of flats built in 1929 which Tower Hamlets Council has been "decanting" in order to carry out a thorough rehabilitation with lifts and central heating. It has been occupied by squatters (ordinary poor families on the Council's housing list) who in parleying with the Council have declared that they want to take the block over as a co-operative and to do their own rehabilitation in accordance with their own priorities—which do not include central heating since they say they would have to turn it off anyway since they could not afford the bills. It remains to be seen whether the Council will co-operate or evict.

6. There is in Glasgow an enterprise sponsored by members of the Department of Architecture at the University of Strathclyde called Project Assist. It has undertaken a rehabilitation programme for the typical old Glasgow tenement houses with the co-operation of tenants or owner-occupiers, while the flats are still occupied. There is a mixture of tenures and ownership, and the project is so sensitive to occupants' wishes, that it will by-pass a flat if necessary. It has a small team of nine men who work together on rapid and inexpensive installations of bathrooms and conversions of the typical three flats per floor into two. Glasgow Corporation itself in a massive change of heart has recently decided to undertake 28,000 rehabilitations. Both Glasgow Corporation and the Housing Corporation have looked very carefully at Project Assist, but I fear that the real lessons—intimate contact and co-operation with the families who live there—are going to elude them.

7. If housing standards were the vital consideration, how is it that on one side of town, sub-standard private housing is cherished and continually improved by its occupants, while on the other Parker Morris expensively built council housing begins its cycle of deterioration the moment it is occupied? There is an urgent need to change to a mode of tenure which involved the tenants in the property. Every big authority has some housing which it cannot persuade people to occupy, so great is the stigma attached to it. In the interests of maximum utilisation it would pay these councils to *give* such property to co-operatives of would-be tenants to move in and rehabilitate it. The law, as it stands, precludes a council from adopting this solution. If Mr. Crosland would authorise such an experiment we would all learn a lot.

8. Even more suggestive is the experience of the USA, where

following the total collapse of Federal housing policy, a variety of expedients are being tried out, including such attractive notions as "sweat equity", "urban homesteading" and several varieties of tenant co-operative. In St. Louis, where as we all know, the famous Pruitt-Igoe project had to be blown up by the US army, there remained nine other public housing schemes. After a prolonged rent strike at one of them a team financed by the Ford Foundation recommended tenant control as a last resort. The team trained residents to run the estate for themselves. All staff, including the estate manager, were tenants. In the last few months the team has put the same programme into operation at three other estates in the city and has been called to Chicago and Newark to attempt the same thing. They regard multi-occupation urban housing as the last frontier of dweller control: "If it can work there it can work anywhere." It is too early to say that this experiment is a success but it does suggest an approach to some of our own "problem estates".

Now Mr. Crosland, in your speech you remarked that "The total resources we have available for housing are inevitably limited. It follows that the higher the *standard* of each individual unit, the lower the total *number* of units we can produce, and the longer we take to produce them." It sounds like elementary logic, but it is only true if we assume that the only factors in the provision of housing are the technocrats and the bureaucrats and the capitalist building industry. The missing factor, left out of all the calculations, is popular involvement. Can we afford to go on leaving it out? This, and not the matter of standards, is the real housing question.

## 4. Professionals or People?

### PLANNING AND DESIGNING THINGS WE CAN LIVE WITH

An exhibition called "Adventure in Town Planning" which has just been held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts illustrates designs for the replanning of London by the staff and students of the School of Architecture attached to the Polish University College, London. With diagrams and models they illustrate the final stage of an imaginary long-term redevelopment of thirteen acres of London together with an overall master plan. How are we to appraise such an exhibition? Is it to be looked upon as an exercise in what the head of the School, Prof. W. K. Smigielski, calls the almost forgotten art of three-dimensional planning or is it to be thought of as a solution to the actual planning problems which London presents? The organisers emphasise that the first alternative is the exhibition's aim, and they point out that what they describe as "the artistic aspect" of planning is neglected today since "town planners are now more concerned with social and economic aspects than with the art of shaping the physical environment". But since their "spatial language of three-dimensional planning" is being applied to actual areas of an actual city, one cannot help being struck by the arbitrary nature of their approach. Finding that certain areas of London have a local character, Fleet Street—the press, Chelsea—art, Soho—food and entertainment, and so on, they have, in an almost entirely rebuilt London, given these same local character-

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istics to these areas. There is thus a mixture of the "tear-down-and-start-again" approach and the "conserve-local-traditions" attitude. If one adopts the first approach, why respect sentimental tradition and keep Eros in his place in Piccadilly Circus, and if one adopts the second, why replan in the rectilinear fashion of these beautifully executed models which illustrate a city of a character very different from that of London?

The Polish architects point out (and we have continually stressed this in *Freedom*) that the rebuilding that is actually being done in London is as "incoherent and indiscriminate" as though no plan at all had been made. Prof. Smigielski says:

"It can hardly be disputed that no new values are being added to the visual appearance of the Metropolis and the existing values, the historic inheritance, are gradually in the process of destruction. This is happening in the period which is widely considered as the area of great town planning development. The Town and Country Planning Act, 1947, vested in authorities an unlimited power of control over human environment. This revolutionary act of legal planning embarked the nation on a great experiment, which may change the physical structure of towns and country in the years to come. The idea leaps to mind, which irreparable damage could be done, taking into consideration the present low level of civic art, if economic considerations and prospects of realisation suddenly improved."\*

While the exhibition with its emphasis on long-term aims, reminds us that we don't see the wood for the trees—that in thinking about details we ignore ultimate ends—it is equally true to say that the same lack of vision affects the smallest details of urban landscape. The local authorities who erect fences of

\* And how right he was. This is just what happened in the developer's paradise of the 60s. V. S. Pritchett in a note to the 1974 edition of his *London Perceived* remarks "I could not know that in a year or two of publication my text would become an epitaph on the death of the Victorian city with its lovely, low, almost Venetian skyline and the daily passing of these intimacies which had given the place its distinction as the most liveable and amiable capital in Europe. The sober and various graces of that London are now being wiped out by the rapacity of property developers and the megalomania of the engineers whose ideal is the standard high-rise American or West-German prison block and its exercise yards, the destruction of locality, the paralysis of traffic and whose real ambition is to make quick fortunes out of renting the sky." (1975.)

chicken-wire, who plant public gardens in the Daily-Mail-Ideal-Home-Exhibition style, who invoke the Town and Country Planning Act to prohibit fly-posting and then permit the enormous advertising sites of the brewers, are hardly likely to show more discrimination in bigger things.

We recently quoted a Lancashire sanitary inspector who declared that adult education began round the kitchen sink. In the same way W. R. Lethaby, a philosopher of town-planning whose ideas were too simple for people to understand them, used to say that town-planning began with whitewashing the back-yard. Until we have learned what he called "town-tidying", and the "conservative surgery" which Patrick Geddes advocated in his work on Indian cities, we cannot hope to make a success of the "artistic aspect of planning" that is worrying Professor Smigielski and his students.

The local authorities may have failed to learn what Lethaby and Geddes and William Morris tried to teach, but the architects of the South Bank Exhibition which closed last Sunday, did not fail. For what was most significant about this exhibition was not the objects on show inside the buildings, but the buildings themselves and their surroundings. There we could see the effect of appropriate design in all the little details of urban environment for which the *Architectural Review* has coined the word *townscape*, and the street furniture that it contains.

Street furniture—lamp standards, telephone boxes, coffee stalls, letter boxes, sign-posts, sandbins, litter baskets, telegraph poles and bus stops—was discussed by Lord Latham in his address to the Design Congress organised last month by the COID. "Our modern street furniture is street clutter," he explained, "and no-one seems capable of restoring order out of chaos." He ended his speech by urging that "design policy should be the interest and care of the highest level of management" and that the "lower levels of management and those they commissioned be given the fullest freedom to exercise their brains, their skill and their imagination with encouraged enthusiasm".

We disagree profoundly! For while we don't know the niceties of precedence and status which determine where the line of demarcation lies in the managerial hierarchy between the "lower levels of management" and the upper level of workers, what we are concerned with above all is that *everyone* should have "the fullest freedom to exercise their skill and their imagination". Then perhaps design and planning could become more than an

exhibition frolic and more than an academic exercise. For, as somebody else said in a casual remark at the Design Congress, "The purpose of design is to make things we can live with."

## TWENTY YEARS LATER:

### PROFESSIONALS CAN'T WIN . . .

Addressing the American Institute of Planners, Ralph Nader once remarked, "I think every individual, whether he's a professional, a technician or a floor sweeper, has got to have in his mind when he is working for an organisation where the line is going to be drawn beyond which his allegiance to society supercedes his allegiance to the organisation."

He went on to declare that one of the characteristics of professional societies is that they *don't* defend the whistle-blower, the man who in this situation, speaks out with the voice of his individual judgement. Yet the function of a professional society in defending the whistle-blower "is basically the mission to make it unnecessary for an individual to exert a terrific act of courage in order to utter a simple statement of truth."

Two recent cases of whistle-blowing among the town-planners illustrate his point. As everybody knows, the GLC is planning the redevelopment of the Covent Garden district in central London. Brian Anson was appointed as deputy principal planner on the GLC Covent Garden team. At the beginning of 1970 he and a colleague, Art Muscovitch, were appointed to elicit public response to the plan (as required by the 1968 Town and Country Planning Act). They discovered that the local residents didn't like the plan which would dispossess most of them for the sake of hotels, offices and a "cultural centre" which didn't cater for their kind of culture.

A copy of a letter of Anson's expressing "grave misgivings" about the plan found its way back to County Hall, and Anson was removed to another job at a lower wage back in County Hall. By June last year he felt obliged to resign, because he was in fact given nothing to do. In the same month Muscovitch was told, "your services are no longer required". But the Royal Town Planning Institute, their professional society, had nothing

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to say on this vital issue of professional integrity.

Konrad Smigielski was for 10 years City Planning Officer for Leicester. Well-known and respected in his profession, it was he who coined the phrase "a town without old buildings is like a man without a memory". For a long time he has been trying to save Town Hall Square in battered Leicester from being pulled down. The Sun Alliance Building—designed by Victorian architect Joseph Goddard—was ripe for demolition to make way for a new £1½ million commercial development, involving a lot of powerful interests. In April, the Department of the Environment in London was given a tip-off to get the building "listed" for preservation, so that any development would have to be "called in" for examination by the Minister (the one thing the developers didn't want).

On 28 April there was a stormy meeting between Smigielski and his employers, in the course of which he is said to have ordered out the chairman of the Town Planning Committee, Alderman Kenneth Bowder. Smigielski's resignation was demanded, and he "retired" early, being given immediate leave of absence.

Smigielski shrugs as he says, "Abuse of power always happens—it is human nature." A few weeks later in the local government elections, labour replaced the conservative administration in Leicester, but Smigielski would not consider returning to his job. "My role was coming to an end, but if I had been in mid-career I would have gone to court and fought the city council." On the issue of Town Hall Square, he may yet have won of course, but what did the Royal Town Planning Institute say about the treatment given by his employers to one of its most distinguished members? You guessed right. Nothing at all.

### ARE THE ARCHITECTS TO BLAME?

Seen in retrospect, in Barrington Kaye's sociological study *The Development of the Architectural Profession in Britain*, the architects' search for status and security by way of statutory registration has followed the same course as that of every other calling with aspirations to professionalism, but it has been complicated by two factors: the architect's pretensions as an artist (the dilemma of artistic autonomy, as Dr. Kaye calls it) and his uneasy feeling, and still more that of the public, that

From *The Twentieth Century*, Spring 1962.

his services are a luxury that need not necessarily be indulged.

Aspiring to be an universal man, the architect's own changing preferences in the architecture of the past have led him to wonder, in moments of self-questioning, whether he might not in fact be a superfluous man. Thirteenth-century churches, "Tudor" cottages, Georgian squares, Regency terraces and Victorian warehouses, were built without benefit of professional gentlemen, as indeed were the converted windmills, oasthouses and stables which are most sought-after as residences within the architectural profession—especially among those practitioners who prescribe the most severely formalised environments for their municipal clients' tenants.

Unlike the teachers however, who seldom point to the connection between ninety years of compulsory education on the cheap and our contemporary nation of semi-literate conformists, the architects have been their own severest critics. Back in the nineties, in the great debate on whether architecture was a profession or an art, that eminent professional, Sir Reginald Blomfield thundered, "Break with professionalism and refuse any longer to prostitute architecture!" And another, Sir Thomas Graham Jackson, remarked "Time was when ugly building was not. In those days there were no architects as we understand them; or rather everyone who had to do with buildings was an architect," and he went on to declare that the distinction between architect and builder was purely conventional and should disappear. Early in this century, the humblest and greatest of English architectural thinkers, William Richard Lethaby, said:

"We have indeed been betrayed by the mysterious word Architecture away from reality into a pretence about styles and orders and proportions and periods and conception and composition. If we had no other words than *building* we might have been living in sound, water-tight, well-lighted dwellings . . . Architecture is human skill and feeling shown in the great necessary activity of building; it must be a living, progressive, structural art, always readjusting itself to changing conditions of time and place."

It is more than a century since William Morris abandoned first architecture, because he could not get close enough to the materials of building, and then painting, because it would not be of service to anyone, and found that if he wanted to furnish his rooms in Red Lion Square with anything that was not actively hideous, he would have to make it himself. And when he married,

the Red House, which Philip Webb designed for him had to be unlike anything hitherto built. Morris, in spite of all we hear about his "mediaevalism" was one of the grandparents of the modern movement in architecture. The others were the great nineteenth-century engineers, and the trouble was that it took so long for these two blood-streams to mingle. In the nineteenth-thirties, when the inspired biologists and physicians who began the Pioneer Health Centre at Peckham sought an architect, they had to find an engineer, Sir Owen Williams, to house their experiment with order, clarity and rationality—qualities which they could not procure from the architectural profession. Just as in 1858, in Morris's house, where all the furnishings and fittings "had to be reinvented, one might say, to escape the flat ugliness of the current article," so the Peckham pioneers in 1937 looked in vain on the English market for suitable furniture and even suitable canteen cutlery and crockery, to meet their modest requirements of simplicity and efficiency.

Today at least, Morris could have got a decent house and furnishings and the Peckham pioneers could have got efficient furniture and equipment (though both would have had to seek them out from the great mass of slick, pretentious, "styled" and "designed" articles). The faltering rediscovery of a vernacular in design, insofar as it exists, has been the result of a series of revolutions in the ideas, and especially in the education, of designers, started by Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, widened by Lethaby and the Design and Industries Association, exported to the continent, and returned to this country by the Bauhaus refugees. But the visual squalor, the clutter and confusion, of our physical environment as a whole, remains. Subtopia (the word was coined by Ian Nairn in the *Architectural Review*), is all around us.

The war was the turning point in the struggle for the acceptance of the ideas of the modern movement, with the emergence into practice of the pre-war generation of rebel students, the propaganda about our "postwar reconstruction", and the desire to cope rationally with urgent building needs. By the time of the 1951 Exhibition on the South Bank, modern architecture had arrived, and even in the Council and committees of the Royal Institute of British Architects, the neo-Georgian gentlemen were slowly replaced by a new generation. But during the last decade, with architects fully employed in a fairly continuous building boom, punctuated by bouts of governmental restriction

of capital investment, the architect's self-questioning has re-emerged. In the early fifties, after one sharp bout of under-employment, the *Architects' Journal* sponsored an enquiry into the state of the profession by Professor Ian Bowen, and in the middle fifties, after stormy general meetings as the RIBA, an ad hoc committee led by Richard Sheppard made a survey of architects' offices from which it became clear that a more intensive and extensive study was wanted.

The pressure for this was increased when the Report of the Royal Commission on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration was published in 1960. The Commission investigated the "career earnings" of various professions and found that architects not only showed the lowest figure for total career earnings, but that at almost every age average earnings of architects were lower than those of the other professions.

Not unnaturally this led the RIBA to ask "Why has society placed such a relatively low value on the services of the architect?" The reader, who has heard similar plaintive cries from probation officers, teachers and nurses, will probably think it is up to the architects to answer this question. But it did lead the RIBA to push forward the project for a comprehensive survey, and, casting around for a sponsor, to find one in the Leverhulme Trustees, who financed an enquiry conducted by two architects, an economist, a statistician and a management consultant, into representative architects' offices, large and small, public and private. The result, *The Architect and his Office: a survey of organisation, staffing, quality of service and productivity, presented to the Council of the Royal Institute*, which appeared in April 1962, was described by the President as "the most comprehensive, candid and valuable self-portrait of this profession, and perhaps of any profession in the country".

Before turning to the survey, let us glance at some of the problems of the architect. How does he see himself as, armed with two A-levels and "good at art" he enters a school of architecture for five years plus one—soon to be two—of "professional practice"? (Pupilage is a form of cheap labour now dead, and part-time study a heroic endeavour now frowned upon, though the evening schools are overflowing.) Whatever his conception of the occupation he is entering, he probably does not see himself as the channel for an expenditure of between £700 and £800 millions annually—the largest single sector of the community's capital investment. He does not think, and nobody

taught him to, of the obligation this imposes on him, because our society does not think it necessary to encourage a sense of social responsibility in work, conceiving this to be a matter for politicians—the least responsible of mortals. Nor is he encouraged to think of himself as part of the building industry; in fact his detachment from it and superiority to it are implicit in his training. The Emmerson Report (on *Problems Before the Construction Industries*) remarks that "In building there is all too often a lack of confidence between architect and builder, amounting at worst to distrust and mutual recrimination. This lack of cohesion is aggravated by the methods of training and the codes for members of the professional bodies."

Partly because of this artificial separation from the building industry, he is insulated from realising that he belongs to a backward industry. Though comparative statistics are unreliable, the economist Norman Leyland concludes that "it appears that there has been very little reduction in the real cost of building over the last hundred years". In 1960 productivity was about 20% above the prewar figure, compared with a 30% rise for industry, where Mr. Leyland notes that "almost the only significant innovations in method in the last 100 years have been the use of factory-made joinery (Allyn Young attributes the fall in the real cost of housing between 1901 and 1911 entirely to this) and power-mixed cement".

That this should be the state of one of the oldest and most basic of human activities in the age of cybernetics and automation, need not occasion surprise, though it ought to arouse anger in view of the unutterable squalor in which many of our fellow citizens live and work. The reason why the building industry is antiquated is because it has little war-potential. Think of those industries which are essential to the military trade—mechanical engineering, aircraft, electronics, and compare their development and the efficiency of their products with those of the building trade. We gape with bemused admiration at Super-Constellations, our ears flap with wonder at Hi-fi, we learn with open mouths of computers than can read the printed page. We dote on astronauts, while the pipes freeze, the neighbours voices boom through the wall, the condensation drips off the window-ledge, and if you want to get warm it is easier to drive around in a car with the heater on than to stay at home. Think of the niggardly budget of the Building Research Station and compare it with the enormous sums pumped by the government into the aircraft and electronics

industries. Aldermaston marchers can hardly fail to notice the contrast between the premises of the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at their starting point, and the sheds and shacks of the Road Research Laboratories which they pass en route in their annual subtopian pilgrimage.

The report of the Parker Morris Committee on housing standards (*Homes for Today and Tomorrow*) published at the end of 1961, made it clear that the ordinary house built today by local authority or speculative developer is obsolete before it is dry. Most modern houses and flats, its authors declare, are too small, too cold, badly designed, inadequately supplied with storage space and electric sockets, equipped with antiquated refuse disposal arrangements, laid out in estates of obsolete design where there is insufficient space either for children's play or for car parking. The same points were rubbed in by Mr. Waddilove's recent report to PEP on post-war housing, which puts the blame firmly on the government and local authorities on the one hand and on the restrictions imposed by building societies on the other. The situation is everybody's responsibility, not merely the architect's but it is one of the factors which prevent him from fulfilling his responsibilities. But suppose that in some fantastic outburst of common sense we were to put first things first, and set about making our towns and cities habitable. Could the building industry rise to the challenge? Could the architects?

It is clear from the RIBA office survey report that if the architects are worried about their incomes they have only themselves to blame. More than half the visited offices made no systematic attempt to control the time and money spent by themselves on the design and supervision of their work, and most offices seemed to work in virtual isolation from one another. "The attitude that each problem, whether of office organisation or of design, must be tackled *de novo* is one which must be highly uneconomic for the profession and the building industry." Management is, says the survey team, "a word which frequently evokes strong feelings of hostility and disdain among architects for they see in it the cold hand of logic and calculation descending on the delicate creative mysteries of their art." But the team at least did not shrink from attempting to assess the "intangible" question of design. They felt able to distinguish two opposite approaches to the design process, which give rise to very different ways of working and methods of organisation. "One was

characterised by a procedure which began by the invention of a building shape and was followed by a moulding of the client's needs to fit inside this three-dimensional preconception. The other began by an attempt to understand fully the needs of the people who were to use the building around which, when they were clarified, the building would be fitted."

For the first type, once the basic act of invention and imagination is over, the rest is easy and he makes decisions quickly, produces work to time and quickly enough to make a reasonable profit. "The evidence suggests that this attitude is the predominant one in the group of offices which we found to be using a *centralised* type of work organisation, and it clearly goes with rather autocratic forms of control. But,

"The other philosophy—from user's needs to building form—makes decision making more difficult. There is always more to be found out about what is needed, always a better solution round the corner. In this process of continual re-adjustment it is not surprising that this sort of architect often loses sight of his immediate time scale. The work takes longer and is often unprofitable to the architect, although the client may end up with a much cheaper building put up more quickly than he had expected. Many offices working in this way had found themselves best suited by a *dispersed* type of work organisation which can promote an informal atmosphere of free-flowing ideas very congenial to the empiricist."

This is fascinating stuff, and the only similar study I can recall is Prof. Seymour Melman's *Decision-Making and Productivity* in which, by comparing the organisation of production for an identical tractor in Coventry and in Detroit, he sought to demonstrate that "there are alternatives to managerial rule over production". And in fact, by treating architecture as a commodity we are more likely to be able to evaluate the profession than if we persist in making it a mystery.

The team found that (apart from a small "hybrid" group of large public offices with a very rigid and hierarchical structure, a poor quality of design, poor technical and managerial efficiency) the offices surveyed could be classed as either centralised or dispersed types. Staff turnover, which bore no relation at all to size of salaries, was high in the centralised offices and low or very low in the dispersed ones, where "there was considerable delegation of responsibility to assistance, and where we found a lively working atmosphere". The small offices were not found

to be very good in terms of efficiency of management, technical efficiency or quality of design, nor were they very productive or profitable. "Our impression was that offices of this size rarely had the resources either in money or staff to give more than an adequate service." It is suggested elsewhere that they should break out of their isolation by group practice or various forms of consortium.

The medium-sized centralised offices had above average standards of management and technical efficiency and a high design quality as well as the highest profitability and productivity of any group. Once they grew larger than a staff of fifty however, they got relatively low gradings for technical efficiency and design quality and their profitability and productivity fell too.

The medium-sized dispersed offices on the other hand, had a mixed standard of managerial efficiency, but high standards of technical efficiency and design quality, which however, were combined with low productivity and profitability. When *they* grew large (this category consisted largely of the better type of public office) their managerial efficiency rose, as did their productivity, and their technical and design standards remained high.

What do we conclude from this? A superficial reading of the report might lead the private architect to conclude that profitability and high income follow the path of centralised autocracy and no nonsense. When the survey was discussed at a special meeting of the RIBA, Grenfell Baines, a successful advocate of co-operative group working, rose to defend the dispersed organisation against this implication with eloquent passion. "Read on" replied a member of the survey team. For the report points out that the centralised offices were rarely concerned with technical advance or profound studies, but appeared to depend rather on a previously developed technical vocabulary which they were good at exploiting. The dispersed type on the other hand,

"Contained several offices which had made important contributions in the field of research and development in design and structural techniques, and were a focal point for the growth of new ideas in the profession and the building industry. They also provided a continuity of organisation independent of any one individual, so that the experience of the office could be carried into the future. They achieved a high standard of service, but had to have plenty of time for discussion, for exploring every angle of the problem before arriving at what they considered to be the correct decisions."

The problem is how to make *this* kind of office more productive, so that its contribution to the country's stock of buildings is higher. It is a hopeful sign that the best attempts at cost-management of the design process that I have seen, as well as the most important developments in building technique and construction consortia, have originated from this kind of office and this type of design philosophy.

The survey report throws an interesting light on the "package deal" or all-in design and supply contract offered by some building contractors, which is regarded as a threat by many architects. The team saw "evidence of a saving of at least 20 per cent in building cost for exactly similar jobs on the same site achieved by the package deal contract" and elsewhere they observe that

"It is worth noting that one of the seven offices given the highest gradings on all three aspects—management, technical efficiency and design—was part of a building contractor's organisation. (It is an interesting commentary on the aspersions that are sometimes cast on this kind of office by other members of the profession that in this case the office was staffed by a team of able, enthusiastic and professionally minded architects who were attracted to working in this way because they wanted to see a closer relationship between the design and production sides of the industry. They were not being paid inflated salaries)."

What about the ordinary small private house, the field of building where standards are lowest and the architects' influence felt least? "Small jobs don't pay" and consequently few large or successful architectural firms will undertake them. The survey team regret this, since the design of individual houses is frequently the only form of direct contact between the public and the architects "and all too often the reputation of the profession is damaged through inadequate service given by the least experienced members of the profession". The Parker Morris report too declared that "The belief that the design of houses is a job that anyone can tackle with success is entirely without foundation—it is one of the most difficult tasks in the whole field of architecture." In this field there is one name that stands out as a glowing exception to the charges of architectural indifference, that of Eric Lyons who has done more than anyone to raise the standards of speculative building. There is also something to be learned from the story of how, invited to include a piece of sculpture in one of the estates he designed, he chose a bent

figure bearing a huge load, signifying the architect's place in our society, weighed down with the burden of obsolete building bylaws and regulations, rigidly enforced by the bureaucracy. (On the other hand we will never develop a new vernacular of decent building if we insist that every last structure has got to be blessed by the magic of the architect. Shouldn't they share whatever wisdom they have, to enable people to house themselves?)

One of the complications which makes the practice of architecture a more exacting task today than ever before is the variety of services required in modern buildings. "*Pour Ledoux, c'était facile: pas des tubes*", le Corbusier once remarked. Now although in theory an architect's education equips him to design technical services, the report makes it clear that "Architects have devolved to others a large part of design responsibilities in the technical field." Large offices, especially public ones, tend to employ their own specialists, others depend, on large jobs, mainly upon consultants, and for small jobs, mainly on sub-contractors and suppliers, for the design of service installations. The majority opinion was that advice received from structural consultants was good or adequate, but that advice from electrical, mechanical, heating and ventilating consultants was poor. Advice on these matters from subcontractors and suppliers was, on the other hand, thought by three quarters of the offices with opinions, to be good or adequate. It is widely thought (among architects) that these special skills should be brought back into the profession, and a few years ago an RIBA committee proposed that a new class of technical assistant membership should be formed. This notion of a "two-tier" profession divided into "artists" and "technicians" was hotly opposed. The office survey team has two recommendations to make. The first is that architectural education should be diversified in order to bring technical design skills back into the profession. "Architects who choose to specialise in the application of these skills ('architechnologists') should not be debarred from membership of the RIBA." The second, while admitting that "technicians are needed in architects' offices in order to raise productivity and standards of service" (in other words, a hostile reader might say, to get architects out of their mess) but "technicians, as non-professionals, should not be admitted to a class of membership of the RIBA, but there should be an institute for technicians, sponsored by the RIBA to ensure the maintenance of standards of education and training." The technician, they conclude, "should not be concerned with

design, and his training should exclude this aspect".

Am I wrong in finding this the most arrogantly Philistine sentence ever to emerge from the RIBA? Should anyone remotely connected with building have design excluded from his training? Should anyone at all in this ugly city be unconcerned with design? The RIBA Council has not yet deliberated on this proposal, but there will be many outside it who will question the architect's divine right to *dominate* the "building team" as it has become fashionable to call the complex group of specialists involved in modern building.

"I receive and I give," wrote Bakunin, "such is human life. Each directs and is directed in his turn. Therefore there is no fixed and constant authority, but a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and above all, voluntary authority and subordination." Irrelevant to our present preoccupations? Not at all, for W. D. Pile, joint head of the Architects and Buildings Branch of the Ministry of Education, specifies among the things he looks for in the members of the building team that "He must have a belief in what I call the non-hierarchical organisation of work. The work has got to be organised not on the star system but on the repertory system. The team leader may often be junior to a team member. That will only be accepted if it's commonly accepted that primacy lies with the best idea and not with the senior man." And Walter Gropius too, proclaims the technique of "collaboration among men, which would release the creative instincts of the individual instead of smothering them . . . The essence of such techniques should be to emphasise individual freedom of initiative, instead of authoritarian direction by a boss . . . synchronising individual efforts by a continuous give and take of its members . . ."

It is not only architects who need to learn such techniques.

## THE SPECTRE OF PLANNING EDUCATION

I hope you won't object to my changing one word of my title from spectrum to spectre. The spectre that is haunting our hopes of public participation in planning is the planners' preoccupation with their own professionalism when they should be thinking about how to share whatever wisdom they have with the public.

One of those homespun American philosophers, Josh Billings, remarked that there was enough advice in this 'ere world to run three planets of the same dimensions. In the same vein we might say that there are enough prescriptions for the education of the planner to run nine professions on the same planetary scale.

If you can remember the nineteen-fifties you might recall a book by Barbara Wootton, *Social Science and Social Pathology* which had an appendix in which she set out, with copious quotations from the trade literature, to demolish the pretensions of the psychiatric social worker. From the literature of that one-time profession, from the descriptions of its training, functions and qualifications, and from the contrast between these aspirations and the actual situation in which its members found themselves—the reality of their situation, Lady Wootton concluded—and the real role they played in the hierarchy of social welfare, she drew the conclusion that it was all role-playing, play-acting, and that the thing that their clients needed more than anything was not casework but cash.

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Paper given at the annual conference of the Education for Planning Association, Liverpool, 2 January, 1974.

One thing is worth noting about this analysis. Today in the nineteen-seventies, you can look through the Jobs-Vacant columns of *New Society*, or of *Social Work Today*, or any other relevant journal that comes your way, and you won't find an ad. for a psychiatric social worker. As a separate trade it doesn't exist any more. Lady Wootton called its bluff.

Very much more recently, Cynthia Cockburn of the Centre for Environmental Studies prepared a report summarising the literature on the education of the planning profession (*Opinion and Planning Education*) which, although she did not set out, like Lady Wootton, to do a hatchet job, had a comparable effect on the reader. What a contrast, once again, between the pretensions of their aspirations and the reality of their situation!

A year ago I was present at a TV interview with Dr. David Eversley on the occasion of his relinquishing the job of Chief Strategic Planner for the Greater London Council. What had he accomplished? asked the interviewer. Nothing, said Dr. Eversley. And what had he learned? Humility, was the reply.

And yet, in his new book *The Planner in Society*, Dr. Eversley, after knocking everyone in sight from the long-haired sociology graduates inciting the mob to revolution, to the systems analysts deciding the fate of the masses, concludes that the planner "must play a much larger role in contemporary society than that for which his education has fitted him".

What is this role? It is nothing less, claims Dr. Eversley, than "that of master-allocator of the scarcest resources: land, and capital and current expenditure on the built environment and the services which are offered to the community".

This is a claim no less grand and all-embracing than the ones assembled by Miss Cockburn. Her document was a preliminary study for a paper prepared by a working group which for eighteen months discussed educational objectives in urban and regional planning. In this group she was joined by a panel of distinguished professionals and academics. Their report, published this year, under the title *Education for Planning: The Development of Knowledge and Capacity for Urban Governance*, is no doubt the yardstick against which members of the RTPI and course-planners in universities and polytechnics have measured the Institute's paper *Implications of Changes in Education and Membership Policy*, but what impression would it give an ordinary member of the public, particularly someone who had listened to the debate over the last five or six years on public participation

in planning?

He would be puzzled, even in the first few pages, which are a glossary explaining the language used, since the words do not mean what his past experience has led him to believe they meant. *Governance*, a word he has not met before, is not for the authors synonymous with *government*. It is a word they have found it necessary to use in order to acknowledge the role of the community as a whole in decision-making. *Planner* does not mean what he thought it meant: it means *any* person contributing to urban governance through the planning process, while *planning*, the authors explain, has been altogether divorced "from its common physical and spatial policy context".

The ordinary reader might be forgiven for assuming that the text based on these definitions was to be about everybody's education in decision-making on resource allocation, and would be disappointed as he read on, to find that this turns out to be yet another manual on the education of a technocratic elite, with the standard warnings about early specialisation and about the need for continuing education because of the rapid obsolescence of knowledge. If he gets as far as page 67 of the report he will read that "The growth of problem-solving power is dependent less on the knowledge learned than on *the way in which it is learned*. The transmission of knowledge in a traditional way may actually diminish a student's ability to think for himself, rather than improve it. Yet this substantive material is necessary: clearly the planner in urban governance needs a sound understanding of the facts and theories available about cities, who governs or misgoverns them, how it is done, and with what results. This presents an educational problem. How can the student acquire a sizeable body of substantive material in a way which increases his capacity to be sceptical of its worth and inventive in its use?"

Here, of course, they are stating *the* educational problem, and the answer they recommend is the organisation of learning around a *problem-focus* and a *student-centred* educational method. And the reader will reflect on the conspicuous absence of these two attributes at any level of education above the primary school.

Francis Amos, one of the signatories of the report, speculating in a Sunday paper about the crisis of planning education, reflected that instead of trying to forecast the right proportion of different kinds of planning specialists, we should perhaps "regard planning reasoning as part of general education because it is an intellectual

discipline as rigorous as learning Latin but rather more useful". But of course the advocates of very many intellectual disciplines would claim that, apart from their own merits, they inculcate valuable modes of thinking. They call it "transfer" and it is claimed as the magic of every school subject from RE to PE. In the professions it would be hard to think of one which is not considered an appropriate discipline to transfer to a new problem-solving situation. Hence all those lawyers, accountants and major-generals in such a variety of decision-taking jobs. The reason why Mr. Amos is right is not because rigorous intellectual disciplines are good for us, but because every citizen should be exposed to decision-making situations, not only to de-mystify him of the idea that the experts have some magic which the rest of us lack, but because we *are* all planners.

The report remarks that decisions "may be 'made' by planners of many different backgrounds and abilities, and finally 'taken' by committees and councils". But think of all those recent decisions, arrived at after employing every kind of expensive specialist wisdom, which have been overturned as a result of the opposition of groups of outraged citizens: in the metropolitan area alone, one could list the London motorway proposals, the siting of the third London airport, Covent Garden and Piccadilly. Dr. Eversley (who rails against the "self-appointed, self-perpetuating oligarchic groups") notes that "most parts of the country can point to some gigantic project which possibly cost hundreds of thousands of pounds to prepare, and was eventually abandoned after appeals, inquiries and ministerial decisions."

What price expertise? The lesson is that the awareness and environmental sophistication of the ordinary citizen is much more important than the educational experience of the professionals. The CES report starts with the assumption that a planner is *any* person contributing to urban governance, and immediately ignores the implications of this and goes on to confine itself to the discussion of the education of a professional élite.

In the whole spectrum of planning education I have discovered only one item which, starting from the same assumption, carries the idea through to its logical conclusion: not that the planner is a special kind of man, but that every man is a special kind of planner. Characteristically this is an Open University production. I am referring to Unit 22 (Community Participation in City Decision Making, by Simon Nicholson and Barbara Schreiner) of Course DT 201 on Urban Development.

Now you would have to be quite unbelievably complacent or thick-skinned to ignore the low esteem that the ordinary public has for "the planners" or to ignore the literary barrage in the last few years which has demolished many of the pretensions of the planning profession. Yet the reaction of the profession is to suggest that some improvement in its own education, a broader base, a higher standard of entry, a longer period of training, more research, more science, more knowledge, more planners, will put everything right.

But what is coming more and more under fire is the very nature of professionalism, precisely because the greater the expertise, the power and the status of a profession, the smaller the opportunity for the citizen to make decisions. Ivan Illich, the most damaging of the new critics of the professionalisation of knowledge, remarks that

"It makes people dependent on having their knowledge produced for them. It leads to a paralysis of the moral and political imagination. This cognitive disorder rests on the illusion that the knowledge of the individual citizen is of less value than the 'knowledge' of science. The former is the opinion of individuals. It is merely subjective and is excluded from policies. The latter is 'objective'—defined by science and promulgated by expert spokesmen. This objective knowledge is viewed as a commodity which can be refined, constantly improved, accumulated and fed into a process, now called 'decision-making'. This new mythology of governance by the manipulation of knowledge-stock inevitably erodes reliance on government by people . . .

"Overconfidence in 'better knowledge' becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. People first cease to trust their own judgement and then want to be told the truth about what they know. Overconfidence in 'better decision-making' first hampers people's ability to decide for themselves and then undermines their belief that they can decide."

In fact, if we were really interested in new directions in planning education, we would be seeking avidly for techniques for *enhancing* people's ability to decide for themselves. We would, for example, shun, rather than welcome, complex techniques which are inexplicable to the layman, because they widen the gap: they offend against the principle of *transparency of operation*. And we would above all change our priorities and see that the planning education of the public is a much more urgent task than improving the education of the planners. This is the missing

end of the spectrum of planning education.

"We tried an exercise in participation, and it was just a colossal waste of time" said a chief planning officer, as though both planners and public can adopt entirely new roles overnight. In one of his reports on the Educational Priority Area project, here in Liverpool, Eric Midwinter, referring to what he calls the planners' lip-service to consultation, says "They may knock on the door of a client for rehabilitation or decantation and ask what sort of home and environment is required. What is the unfortunate interviewee to say in answer to this? What in too many cases he could say is something like this, 'I was never educated to listen to that kind of question nor to articulate responses, technical or creative, to it.'"

## EDUCATION FOR PARTICIPATION

The story used to be told about the editor of a Yiddish newspaper in Whitechapel that every time he saw a funeral in Commercial Road, he would telephone Mr. Ginsburg (the printer, not the planner) to ask him to print one copy fewer next week. In the same way, every time we see the demolisher's hoarding go up around a building, we lament the loss of one more echo of the *genius loci*, the spirit of the place. For we know, not from sentimental nostalgia, but from experience, that what will go up is going to be just as dreary as, or even drearier, than what is coming down, and will not even have the saving grace of familiarity or low rents.

If the ordinary low-income town-dwellers (i.e., the vast majority of the population) really had the opportunity to participate in planning, they would opt for being left to their own devices, not because they were satisfied with their environment but because they know that the planner is not *their* servant, but that of either the bureaucrat or the speculator, or both. Education for participation in planning is not education about aesthetics, or about cost-benefit or central place theory, it is education about power. The most glaring weakness of the Skeffington Committee's educational recommendations is precisely that they fail to recognise

Lecture given at the ILEA Centre for Urban Educational Studies, 5 June, 1973.

this. Their second weakness is that they see the process of education merely as a matter of informing people. There are at least three different notions of education: the child is a jug to be filled, clay to be moulded, or a flower to be nurtured. There is also, of course, the idea which can be seen in all three concepts: that education is initiation, and that the child is a novice to be taken by the hand and led through the gates of wisdom. It is like that scene in *The Magic Flute* where Tamino and Pamina are led into the temple, with the teacher in the role of Sarastro. Perhaps this is why an American writer recently announced that the teacher is a "victim of role inflation".

Certainly we expect a lot from the education system. Mr. L. C. Taylor remarks in his book *Resources for Learning* that "Whenever a new matter is recognised as a proper focus for general concern or public intervention, the demand grows for its inclusion in the curriculum. And how such matters multiply! Nothing is more important than personal relationships (what about marriage guidance from the fourth form upwards?) unless it be health (give them balanced meals, inoculations, a swimming pool). Our future as a nation depends on developing computers (add a bit more to the maths syllabus). Racial conflict will destroy us—unless the H-Bomb, the motor car, drugs, environmental pollution, old age, get there first. So somehow there must be instruction in such matters . . ." We are all queueing up to pour in our specific wisdom, with a touching faith in the jug's capacity to hold it all. The Skeffington Committee recommended that we should pour in "knowledge about the physical planning of the community" and we all fervently agree. But do we know how to do it effectively?

An able critique of the Skeffington Report by Brian Styles<sup>4</sup> (who lifts the whole discussion up to a consideration of the different concepts of democracy behind the arguments on participation) makes the suggestion that the Community Forums which Skeffington recommended, having no power, "may do a disservice to the idea of participation if they raise hopes that they do not have the power to fulfil" and that the importance which the Report attached to education may also be misplaced, for (and here he is quoting J. A. Schumpeter) "without the initiative that comes from immediate responsibility, ignorance will persist in the face of masses of information however complete and correct". Those educators who are neither jug-fillers nor clay-moulders, will readily assent to this proposition, but how can

we apply it to children when we don't to adults?

The Skeffington Committee said in effect that you can have no participation without education: "The education of secondary school children about aspects of community life offers the best foundation for worthwhile participation in the years to come." But let us reverse the slogan and declare that you can have no education without participation. The Covent Garden saga is instructive here. You will remember that Brian Anson, the planning officer charged with the task of ensuring public participation was converted to the point of view of the local public whose participation had been sought, and left the service of the Greater London Council to enter that of the Covent Garden Community as their advocate. His conclusion from this unique experience was that the Community "should set up a planning school inside the area to teach local residents some elements of planning and how they can be applied".<sup>5</sup>

An impossible dream, when after all, it takes years for the professionals to acquire their expertise? Well, even David Eversley, when he was the GLC's chief strategic planner, warned us at the Town Planning Summer School against the misuse of "pseudo-scientific" management tools in planning, and the pretence based on them that practitioners of these techniques could produce exact, objective answers. The whole exercise, he said, was riddled with value judgements and it would be well not to try to disguise the fact.<sup>6</sup> Even if you have doubts about Mr. Anson's "absurdly simple" idea, transfer it to the ordinary school situation. Imagine a committed teacher with several periods a week at his disposal during his class's final year at school, armed with adequate resource materials, and with a loyal head who would support him when he was criticised for spending more time in the street than in the classroom, when his class's activities continually made headlines in the local paper, and when its involvement with local community action groups was questioned by authority. (Certainly it takes some imagining.) Could he make do-it-yourself planners of his recalcitrant early leavers?

The beauty and the boldness of one American "learning package"—the *Urban Action—Planning for Change*<sup>7</sup> kit is that it seeks to do just that—to give its users a grounding in planning techniques and to inspire them out of the "general apathy and fatalistic indifference" that Mr. Anson observed, into applying these lessons to their locality, and through demonstrations, lobbying and community action, to *change* their environment. The "Hatch

kit" as it is known, after its deviser C. Richard Hatch, grew out of the activities of ARCH, the Architects' Renewal Committee in Harlem, and has no equivalent in this country, where, traditionally, we fight shy of involving school students in real issues.

"Lessons on such subjects will come to life most vividly where children feel involved," said the Skeffington Committee, but it went on to recommend merely visits to local planning exhibitions and essay competitions. If we really hope to involve them we have to be a great deal bolder and more provocative than that. Every aspect of education for citizenship in Britain has been vitiated by the jug-filling tradition. There used to be in many schools, and no doubt still is in some, a subject called Civics—a kind of poor man's British Constitution—which was, typically, a recitation of the functions of various municipal officials, and of the differences between a county borough and a borough, presented in an uncritical and unhistorical, purely descriptive fashion, all with the best of intentions and a minimum of effective learning. No wonder our fellow citizens grow up with a bored contempt for the parish pump. "Civic education" declares Bernard Crick, "must be aimed at creating citizens. If we want a passive population, leave well alone."<sup>8</sup>

Professor Crick was arguing, in the context of political education in school, for the need to accept conflict over political issues and to avoid presenting *the* system and *the* consensus as some kind of universal truth. "If politics is the recognition and tolerance of diversity, so must be a political or civic education . . . To stress deliberately 'what we have in common' and to underplay differences is both a false account of politics and a crippling dull basis for a political education . . . 'Consensus' is not something to be invoked like spiritual cement to stick something together that would otherwise be broken apart; it is, on the contrary, a quality which arises to ease the continued co-existence of those who have been living together. It is not prior to the experience of a political community; it is a product of that experience, and therefore cannot be meaningfully taught until a person understands however generally and simply, the actual political problems and controversies of his community."

If we ever want a society in which the skills to manipulate the environment are accessible to all the people, and not merely to an articulate and sophisticated minority, we have to devise a framework for environmental education which really engages the ordinary school student. In a perceptive paper on the subject,

Michael Storm observed that

"Despite a considerable experience of orthodox 'local study' in history, geography and social studies, they are ill-equipped to understand the *processes* at work in their society, affecting their environment. The treatment of local themes in such a way as to interest young people requires much thought, much preparation—and a degree of sophistication which is often lacking. Quantities of information, whether presented didactically or 'discovered' by field observation or from local documentary sources are not sufficient to guarantee effective 'involvement'. Too often, it appears, programmes of local study set out to deal with the question: 'what should people know about their locality?' An apparently minor alteration of this question to: '*what issues are currently alive in this area?*' would in fact occasion a complete reconsideration of the programme. In the first place, the question implies that there could be no standard approach or content to local studies, since themes will vary according to locality. Yet wherever the school is situated, a problem-oriented approach to local study is possible."<sup>9</sup>

He suggests that there is no other area of the curriculum with such a gap between universally accepted policy and actual practice, and that the over-facile advocacy of "local investigation" in excessively general terms produces an inevitable disillusionment for the teacher. The bright suggestion "Let's find out" is met by a sullen "Why?" And an answer on the lines of "So that when you grow up you will be able to make an intelligent contribution to environmental decision-making" is not likely to generate enthusiasm in the ordinary child who knows from experience that his environment is not *his*. The child, in several respects is *at war* with the environment. An official report on municipal housing estates in Scotland remarks that "The years of deprivation have produced widespread apathy in the majority of tenants and violent protest among the minority of young people."<sup>10</sup> Nor will educational expenditure change their attitudes: "There is a sense in which the provision of expensive educational apparatus can be seen as an affront by pupils from poor homes; in which the building of a fine new school among the detritus of demolition can be seen by children from the wretched houses which remain as a two-finger gesture directed by society towards those who have failed to reach its minimum standards."<sup>11</sup>

The actual impact of the activities of "the planners" on the inner urban population can so frequently be seen as antipathetic

to the interests of the inhabitants that one is bound to concur with the view of John Gower Davies that the social effect of planning is that of "a highly regressive form of indirect taxation".<sup>12</sup> In this context a Skeffingtonian exercise in "participation" is bound to be seen as a manipulative propagandist exercise to fob off opposition to decisions which have already been made elsewhere. The working class secondary school child is as aware of this as his parents are. Any effort to give him an education in participation means starting from an awareness of his own interests and how to fight for them.

And this is hardly surprising since it is the way we got our own education for environmental participation. You and I, reader, and people like us, who know how to throw our weight about, who understand the mysteries of CPOs and GIAs, pressure groups and public enquiries; how did we acquire our particular wisdom? It certainly wasn't through lessons on *The City Beautiful* or *How the Town Hall Works*. It was through *involvement* in particular issues, furious local conflicts, rows over deficiencies, arguments about missing facilities. It might have begun with aesthetic wrangles over lamp-posts, arguments about the borough engineer's policy of chopping down the plane trees and planting flowering cherries, or political battles of rents, involvement in the squatters' movement, or agitation for a playground. Whatever it was, however worthy or trivial, it gave us an instant education in *The System and How to Manipulate It*.

Common sense, as well as what we have painfully learned about the psychology of learning, indicate that our children are no different: rarely kindled by an abstract interest in the broader issues, but rapidly involved in the local and immediate controversy, and gaining in insight and effectiveness as this involvement deepens. The only way a child learns to ride a bike is by riding one, and the only way that anyone, child or adult, learns to participate in environmental decision-making is by doing so.

In the adult world the most important work in education for participation is done, not in the formal education system, but informally through the activities of voluntary organisations and pressure groups. This is emphasised in the evidence submitted to the Committee of Enquiry into Adult Education (the Russell Committee) whose report is awaited at the time of writing. But within the traditional pattern of adult education classes run by local authorities, the WEA, and university extension departments, there has been a marked increase in the number of

courses on topics like citizens' rights and community development.<sup>13</sup> Most organisers of such classes are only too anxious to run courses on planning topics if a minimum number of students and a lecturer can be found. But the result is often disappointing for those who seek to enlighten the underprivileged. One planner found that his class consisted entirely of his fellow professionals with a couple of local councillors. Reyner Banham remarks that "when WEA was young, one of its main functions was to help the workers to survive and prosper through exploiting the machinery of a bourgeois democracy. It was the never-acknowledged aim of the WEA to equip its members with bourgeois know-how." And he goes on to describe the WEA syndrome at work in efforts to involve the public in planning decisions in Los Angeles. The planners, he says, were going to go into the streets, into the ghettos, into the suburbs and on to the beaches and get the word from the consumers of planning themselves. The people were delighted, and they came up with a long list of complaints and things which they thought needed to be done, "How can I find a parking space downtown?" "How can I get the Mexicans out of my neighbourhood?" All kinds of live issues like that, which for good liberal professional reasons, don't appear in the planner's vocabulary at all . . . Then, of course, the planners saw that the thing to do was to explain to the people what planning was really about, and out came those handy little booklets explaining high and low density, high rise and low rise, cluster and distributed. But the people just walked away. The book just didn't tell you how to get the Mex out of your neighbourhood, or how to find a parking lot outside a shop downtown. Once the rules of the game were known to both sides it was seen to be no game. Like, bad thinking stopped play.<sup>14</sup>

There are a number of morals to be drawn from Professor Banham's cautionary tale, but the most important one for us is the one he misses out: the object of education for participation is to equip everybody with that bourgeois know-how, so that, in his example, the Mexicans can fight for their place in the sun, and the down-town dwellers can resist the parking demands of the out-of-town commuters. "Education" in this context means effective community self-organisation, and we haven't yet discovered the best recipe for that, though there are some hints in American experience—that of the late Saul Alinsky for example. Michael Norton<sup>15</sup> divides the possibilities of adult edu-

cation in planning into two fields: operating through established groups and operating independently. In the first category he lists (1) a series of lectures on particular topics, e.g., on housing, to tenants' associations, (2) a "trigger" lecture of slides and tape—to initiate further activities, (3) showing existing films (e.g., TV documentaries) to groups followed up by discussion of the issues, (4) mounting a project on a particular local problem at the request of a community group. In the second category he suggests (1) running a planning advice column through the local paper, (2) running an evening class, (3) working on one particular local issue and concentrating on the people affected to garner ad hoc support, (4) mounting a full-scale community development programme, (5) running a competition or game through, for example, the local pub.

A discussion of his proposals among organisers of adult classes brought out the point that the normal methods of publicising these—circularising last year's students, displaying posters and brochures in the local library—ensured that recruitment was confined to the typical evening class member, and that if you want to cast the net wider you must do your own publicity among the people you want to attract to the course.

But the idea of community participation has not sprung up in isolation in the field of physical planning—there are stirrings in other aspects of life, including education. The concept of the community school, with a long history going back to Henry Morris's dream of the village college, the "de-schooling" philosophy which sees the community and its environment as *the* educational resource, the various efforts to bring the surrounding community into the school and to "explode" the school into the community,<sup>16</sup> all have profound implications for the way we conceive education for participation, whether for children or adults. In Liverpool for example, both officially in Eric Midwinter's EPA project, and unofficially in the Scotland Road Free School which itself is part of a community project, the distinction between "education" and "community self-help" dissolves. Already some people are seeing the school, whose catchment area often delineates the neighbourhood and provides a link between families, as the Enquiring School, the community's own research unit, while Danny McDowell and Derek Robinson of the Nuffield Teacher Enquiry see the school as a "Centre for Community Representation and Planning".<sup>17</sup>

More important than the formal educational machinery, however

much we transform it, are the efforts to bring education for participation into the street: contact-making activities like street theatre, didactic drama for performance anywhere that people congregate, a shopfront planning clinic run in association with a housing aid centre, and above all, the use of local papers or the launching of community papers like those which have proliferated in the last few years—the *Tuebrook Bugle*, or *Brixton's Own Boss* are examples—where a conscious effort is made to give citizens access to the know-how of urban decision-making. Handbooks and guides are already in existence the aim of which is to demystify the planning process.<sup>18</sup> They are not text-books for courses in participation, but resources to be drawn upon by the citizen who has become involved in an issue and wants to find out how the system works, and how *he* can work it.

Involvement, whether for adult or child begins with local issues, but it should not end there. We are so unversed in the theory, and so totally unfamiliar with the practice of a participatory society, that we have yet to evolve the framework for popular large-scale planning or to move beyond the defensive stance. One pioneering venture in long-term strategic planning was proposed by Robert Allen in Newcastle.<sup>19</sup> He suggested that anybody and everybody in the North-East, professionally or privately, should collaborate in drawing up a "Blueprint" for the region, "NE 2073 — A Future for the North-East" imagining it to be a semi-independent region with sufficient self-government to formulate its own agricultural, educational, development, employment, housing, transport and urban renewal policies—in other words free to do what it likes in all those areas that would not have direct effect on other regions. The committees will discuss how the region could meet "basic" demands—for food, shelter, health, etc., and how to *stabilise and contain* "surplus" demands—more and bigger roads, reservoirs and so on. They will try to decide the optimum population for the North-East, how satisfying employment can be given to its citizens without causing ugliness and ill-health, and what social reforms are necessary . . .

This apparently theoretical exercise is in fact intensely practical, for several reasons, not the least of them being that as Mr. Allen says, "Everyday decisions by local government are taken with a number of limited futures in mind, and sometimes none at all. This is why they betray so little imagination or insight. If you want to change the decisions, big or small, you've got to change the framework in which they're taken." In school, a strategic plan

for the region can be tackled through a range of subject areas as a continuing and developing theme, linked with local enquiry and with local publicity. In the adult world it can provide a yardstick against which to assess actual plans and to formulate alternatives, to decide what to support, what to oppose.

There is no recipe for education in participation. There are simply a variety of techniques (many of which like gaming and simulation or community video have not been discussed here) but there are certain principles. The most important of these is that people, young or old, learn through involvement, and not through being told. The second is that participation does not consist of having ready-made decisions explained to you, it implies *making* decisions. In school this means that we are not educating for participation if we just pour in information about planning legislation and its background; we can only do it by involving the young in real issues and real controversies: they can look up the rules for themselves. In the adult world it embodies the very difficult art of convincing people that they can make effective choices and can organise themselves to put those choices into effect. The Skeffington Committee assumed that "participation" would streamline the procedures of professional planning. It will not. Education for participation, if we take the words seriously aims at de-professionalising decision-making. It seeks nothing less than changing the meaning of the word "planning" from a specialist activity of paternalistic government to one of the normal attributes of citizenship.

- 1 Eric Midwinter: *Projections: an educational priority area at work* (Ward Lock, 1972).
- 2 L. C Taylor: *Resources for Learning* (Penguin Education, 1971).
- 3 *People and Planning* (HMSO, 1969).
- 4 Brian Styles: "Public Participation—a Reconsideration" (*Journal of the Town Planning Institute*, April 1971).
- 5 *Building Design*, 1 October, 1971.
- 6 *The Times*, 7 September, 1971.
- 7 C. Richard Hatch Associates: *Urban Action: Planning for Change* (Boston, USA: Ginn and Co., 1970).
- 8 Bernard Crick: "Bias" (*Teaching Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 1, May 1972).
- 9 Michael Storm: "Schools and the Community—an Issue-Based Approach" (*Bulletin of Environmental Education*, No. 1, May 1971).
- 10 *Council House Communities: A Policy for Progress*. Report of a Sub-Committee of the Scottish Housing Advisory Committee (HMSO, 1970).
- 11 Paul Widlake: "Resources and the less able child" (*Teachers' World*, 25 August, 1972).

- 12 John Gower Davies: *The Evangelistic Bureaucrat* (Tavistock Publications, 1972).
- 13 See Peter Clyne: *The Disadvantaged Adult* (Longmans, 1973).
- 14 Reynier Banham: "Alternative Networks for the Alternative Culture?" in *Design Participation*, ed. Nigel Cross (Academy Editions, 1972).
- 15 Michael Norton: "An educational Programme in Planning—Notes for Discussion", Member's Paper, No. 6, Community Planning Group, City of Westminster, December 1972.
- 16 See Colin Ward and Anthony Fyson: *Streetwork: The Exploding School* (Routledge, 1973).
- 17 *Report of the Conference on Social Deprivation and Change in Education*, University of York, April 1972.
- 18 John Ardill: *Citizen's Guide to Town and Country Planning* (Charles Knight & Co. for the TCPA, 1973).
- 19 Robert Allen at the *Planning for People* conference of Tyneside Environmental Concern, 21 October, 1972.

## PLANNING AND HUMAN NEEDS

In the barrage of criticism of "the planners", and more important, of self-criticism by planners in the last few years, no more deadly shot has been fired than the remark of Councillor Jon Gower Davies of Newcastle, who declares that

"Planning in our society . . . is in essence the attempt to inject a radical technology into a conservative and highly inequalitarian economy. The impact of planning on this society is rather like that of the educational system on the same society: it is least onerous and most advantageous to those who are already well off or powerful, and it is most onerous and least advantageous to those who are relatively powerless or relatively poor. Planning is, in its effect on the socio-economic structure, a highly regressive form of indirect taxation."

This is a harsh judgement, but one which is true of this country and is also true of the United States, and it is one which would have been totally inconceivable and incomprehensible to the founding fathers of this Association. What would Ebenezer Howard have made of it? Would such distinguished members of the Association in its early days as W. R. Lethaby, Raymond Unwin or Patrick Abercrombie have understood how this criticism

Address to the 75th anniversary national conference of the Town and Country Planning Association, London, 3 December, 1974.

came to be made, and why it cannot be brushed aside? One of the earliest and greatest supporters of the Association understood perfectly well, and gave us a clear warning. I will come to him later.

Now hardly a week goes by without our seeing on television some programme about the inner city and its redevelopment, and the effect of this on the inhabitants. We have seen this story told so often, and from so many different towns and cities in Britain, that we are hardened to it: it ceases to shock us. One Director of Housing assured me indeed that the TV producers were irresponsible mischief-makers who deliberately sought out agitators and malcontents in order to bring discredit on the authorities and on the elected representatives of the public. I think there is a lot to get agitated and malcontented about.

Earlier this year I interviewed one of these victims of policy in the inner city for the BBC. He lived in one of the few still-occupied houses in a street in Canton, Cardiff. Nobody had handpicked him. I simply knocked on the door of one of the houses which still had curtains in the windows—one of which still had windows, in fact. I talked to him for an hour or more. The BBC used about ten seconds of his story, probably because it was so typical of innumerable other stories in every other city that there was nothing remarkable about it. On the other side of the street, the houses were a heap of rubble. Beyond it the gypsies were encamped, and as we talked at the front door, the gypsy children came crowding round, delightedly yelling "Candid Camera" at the technicians, so we went through to the back garden, and there beyond the dahlias and rhubarb, Mr. Sims opened a hutch and brought out his ferret. He draped the creature round his neck and reassured me, "She won't bite you while I'm here."

He reminisced about the former occupiers of the desolate houses and gardens all around. This one, whose pigeon house with its fretted decoration still stood; that one whose pear trees cropped so heavily and would again this year; that other one who had always organised street parties with tables, benches and bunting all down the street on occasions of national rejoicing. "We were like one big family" he said, but now of course these neighbours were scattered to the winds in the new estates outside the city.

Mr. Sims had been born in that street and his grandparents had lived there. He belonged to that not inconsiderable group of poor owner-occupiers (how dare they be poor *and* independent?) who

in the forties and fifties had managed by hook or by crook to buy the houses they had rented for years, regarding them as an insurance against destitution in old age. It was not an unfit house: it was a fit house, piecemeal improvements over the years had given it a bathroom, a WC and hot water supply and so on. It, and the street and the surrounding streets were being emptied and demolished in a rolling programme of the Council's. The Council was selling the land to a private developer who was building houses for sale at prices which were many times the compensation that the Council was proposing to pay him. His former neighbours had been paid £1,800. If he just regarded this as a deposit on one of the new houses (whose floor area was in fact, smaller) he would never have got acceptance as a mortgagee because his income was low and his age 53.

The Council were offering him a tenancy in one of the new estates on the fringe of the city, but this, he said, was of no use to him. He loathed the status of tenant, he thought the rents were too high, he ridiculed the design, and he despised what he regarded as the humiliation of having to apply for a rebate and supplementary benefit when he became 65 and had to stop working, because he saw this as seeking charity from some officious bureaucrat. Life, he thought, would be hideously expensive on the new estate, and he compared prices at the new high-rent supermarket there with those at the low-rent corner shop in Canton.

And what, he asked, was going to happen to the widow who kept the corner shop? She would be deprived of her livelihood. But so would Mr. Sims himself, for his job involved him in getting up at four and walking down to work to open the gates for the lorries. Quite apart from the fares, there was no means of transport at that hour.

So the Council, in one operation, were taking away his friends, his home, his job, were putting up his family's cost of living, taking away his garden and the produce it provided, taking away his hobby (going out with his ferret at weekends), taking away the security which he had procured for himself and his wife for their old age. And they were doing so to make a profit from selling the land to a speculator who also intended to make a profit. This is regressive taxation with a vengeance. "I don't know," Mr. Sims said quietly, "how the Corporation can be so cruel." In his view the Council had waged a war of attrition against a whole community, slowly and deliberately running down

a whole neighbourhood and depriving it of its amenities. Pubs and chipshops had closed, street lights were not maintained, the pavement was unsafe. Vandals and petty thieves were looting adjoining houses. More than once they had broken into his, thinking it too was abandoned. His neighbours used to be his childhood friends. Now his only neighbours were rats, meths men, vagrants and lead thieves. His children, now in their teens, were growing up in dereliction and decay, in the corpse of a community that has been murdered.

Don't suggest that I am getting sentimental about a traditional working class way of life that is dying on its feet. I am simply saying that no-one and no body has the right to murder it and describe the activity as planning. And don't suggest that Mr. Sims was taking an understandably narrow and parochial view of the problems facing the Corporation. He is a thoughtful and sensitive man. He had his own opinion of Cardiff's grandiose Centreplan proposals. (I share it.) I mentioned that he despised the new estates on the city fringe. But his last words to me were, "What is the point of building an Olympic swimming pool and sports centre when the kids won't be able to afford the bus fare into town? Surely if the Corporation really thought about the welfare of the people out there, and if they really wanted to do something about hooliganism and vandalism among the kids, they would build several little pools and put them not in the centre, but one on each estate."

No wonder that the architect Bruce Allsopp remarks in his latest book, "It is astonishing with what savagery planners and architects are trying to obliterate working-class cultural and social patterns. Is it because many of them are first generation middle-class technosnobs?"

Now planners say, well we have learned from our dreadful mistakes of the last decade, and we are moving over to policies of rehabilitation, GIAs, HAAs and so on. No-one could have foreseen, etc., etc. But it *was* foreseen. Who said this, and when?

"Town planning is not mere place-planning, not even work-new places against their associations, wishes, and interests—as planning. If it is to be successful it must be folk-planning. This means that its task is not to coerce people into we find bad schemes trying to do. Instead its task is to find the right places for each sort of people; places where they will really flourish. To give people in fact the same care that we give when transplanting flowers, instead of harsh evictions and arbitrary

instructions to 'move on', delivered in the manner of officious amateur policemen."

Well, that was said by Patrick Geddes, sixty years ago.

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Let us turn to the Quality of New Environments. Everyone knows, especially abroad, that the New Towns are the great positive achievement of British town planning. When you really get to know them, you get to know what their limitations are, and particularly what the limitations of the New Town policy as a whole are, in spite of 75 years of advocacy by this Association of the New Town idea. We talk of them collectively but in fact *once* you know them they are all different, and again the more you get to know how wide of the mark are many of the criticisms made of them. TCPA people are critical too, though from a different point of view. But considered as an attempt to combine place-planning, work-planning and folk-planning, how infinitely higher in quality they have been than those new environments embarked upon by the great cities without benefit of the New Town mechanism: in particular in their attempt to bring jobs as well as people, and the attempt, at least, to undertake what we have to call Social Development. I am sorry to make invidious comparisons, but compare, say, Easterhouse with East Kilbride, or Cantril Farm with Runcorn, or Chelmsley Wood with Telford, or Thamesmead with any of the New Towns in the home counties.

When we look at the redevelopment of inner city areas it is a very different story. One of the reasons why people fear and mistrust the planning process is that a major stream in town planning ideology, stemming from the Metropolitan Improvement and Public Health legislation of the 19th century, as much as from the speculative pirates of the last decade in search of the maximum lettable floor space, has sought to make the crooked places straight, to iron out the kinks, to eliminate non-conforming users, and, in short, to impose geometry upon urban geography.

But there is also a quieter, gentler, and more responsive tradition which stems from the notions of "conservative surgery" preached and practised by Patrick Geddes, with the intention of combining the conservation of the whole with the renewal of parts in the urban environment, cherishing rather than eliminating the *genius loci*.

It is gradually dawning on us that total renewal, with the years of dislocation this implies—years of decline, of dereliction, of

demolition of subsequent building operations—means that after a generation or two the *whole* environment becomes obsolete simultaneously, so that total destruction and replacement have to happen all over again.

The reconstruction of the inner city has another effect—the shift from a fine-grained to a coarse-grained environment. This is very obvious in the surface texture—the change from small-scale buildings with a lot of visual interest to largescale buildings with much less to beguile the eye. The coarse, crude, slab-like character of post-war buildings slaps you in the face in every British city, from pavement to skyline.

But it is also apparent in the economic and social pattern of the city. All those small-scale business enterprises which provided the enormous variety of service trades and occupations which are one of the reasons why people congregate in cities in the first place, disappear because the high rents of new buildings cannot be sustained by the turnover of small businesses depending on low overheads. No umbrella-repairers, picture-frame makers, pastrycooks or ballet-shoe makers. No voluntary organisations, small publishers or chiropodists. Only large-scale, highly capitalised, high-turnover and big-profit entrepreneurs need apply.

It affects homelessness, too. The gradual disappearance of cheap rented accommodation, boarding-houses, common lodging houses, means that there is nowhere for the poor and homeless to lay their heads. Hence the growing “problem” of homeless single people in the cities. There are more people sleeping rough in London today than in, for instance, New York, where there are still cheap, run-down properties, and consequently *somewhere* for people to sleep at all levels of wealth and poverty.

Similarly it implies the death of cheap eating-houses and places of entertainment: no room for them in the new office blocks and shopping centres of the rebuilt city. The effect of this coarsening of the texture of urban life can be seen in every city in the country.

The new urban environment discriminates against the poor—that goes without saying. It discriminates against the old, too—they are just a nuisance. As the German writer Alexander Mitscherlich says (he is talking about Munich, but it might as well be anywhere), it discriminates against the child: “The anthropologist cannot get over the fact that the commercially-oriented planning of our cities is clearly aimed at one age group only—working adults—and even then inadequately enough. How

a child is to become a working adult seems to be a negligible factor. The world of the child is a sphere of the socially weak, and is ruthlessly manipulated.”

The worst piece of advice that planners have ever accepted was Daniel Burnham's injunction to “Make no little plans”. Regardless of the fact that the planning officer is often quite low in the pecking order in County Halls (even among the environmental professions) others—the highway engineer, the director of housing, and so on—may wield more effective power and influence. And regardless of the fact that we have consistently failed to solve the problem of land acquisition and betterment values—upon which the effective use of the planning powers we have depends—regardless of this, we have insisted on thinking big, and drawing up plans which were totally unrealisable or which depended on the projection into the future of economic and demographic trends which have proved to be transient. In a strange way, the poorest and most deprived cities, the ones with the greatest unemployment problems and the least resources for redevelopment, have been the ones most intent on obliterating their past.

All departments have been thinking big. The education department has been thinking big about schools: the economies of scale and the enhancement of opportunities for all, in our giant unmanageable schools were obvious, weren't they? The highways department, with its implicit motto Get the Traffic Through at All Costs, thought big about roads—there is scarcely a city in Britain that hasn't been disembowelled for the sake of an inner ring road. The routes run, needless to say, through the working districts. Blessed be the city whose engineer was lazy, a golf addict, or nearing retirement, for it may have been spared an inner ring road, and have the opportunity to develop a variety of small, less environmentally disastrous solutions in traffic management.

All the while, too, we have thought big about flats. A rather sinister combination of architects, contractors, tower-crane entrepreneurs, the National Building Agency and innumerable public relations consultants have littered our cities with tower blocks, laying up another store of insoluble problems.

Once again people say, “We didn't know. We have learned from our past errors. Nobody told us . . .” This Association told them consistently all through the forties, the fifties and the sixties. It was not last year but in 1945 that Frederic Osborn, wrote:

“I don't think philanthropic housing people anywhere realise

the irresistible strength of the impulse toward the family house and garden as prosperity increases: they think what the suburban trend can be reversed by large scale multi-storey buildings in the down town districts, which is not merely a pernicious belief from a human point of view, but a delusion. In a few years the multi-storey technique will prove unpopular and will peter out. Damage will be done to society by the trial, but probably all I can do is hasten the date of disillusion. If I have underestimated the complacency of the urban masses, the damage may amount to a disaster."

In vain, his successor as Chairman of the Association, Professor Peter Self, argued in the 1950s that it was "short-sighted and a trifle hypocritical to impose standards (of density) on council housing occupants which the rest of the community are busy rejecting".

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The experience of the United States has paralleled our own, only worse. Their system of Planning ordinances has ensured that urban renewal is synonymous with running the poor out of town. Their system of public housing has ensured that the word housing-project is synonymous with low-income, high-problem ghetto. Urban renewal got quite a jolt from the long hot summers of the 1960s, and a series of notions like advocacy planning, community planning, citizen planning, have been groping for ways of cutting planning down to size and making it responsive to human needs and aspirations. The Americans have learned, as Lee Rainwater notes, "that 'decent housing' does not really make for any major changes in the life situation of the poor. In addition, whatever changes might occur come to naught because there are not sufficient opportunities available in other areas, particularly in employment. As a result, in many cities, public housing has simply become a more visible kind of slum, and by its very existence as a *public* programme highlights the failure of the federal response to poverty."

I turn finally to the significance of the TCPA's own anniversary. I have already indicated that in my view the Association's policies have been wiser and more realistic than most of those actually adopted by central and local government and their professional officers, and that this was not a matter of expertise. Neither of the founding fathers of modern British town planning would have made much of the barrage of sophisticated techniques which planning theorists have set up as a smokescreen between themselves and the public. They offend against the great principle

of *transparency of operation*, which demands that what is done in the name of the public should be comprehensible to the public. The town-planning movement (for it was a movement, long before it was a profession) in this country, sought to be a great popular and populist movement for urban improvement and renewal. In his little book about Ebenezer Howard, Mr. Moss-Eccardt tells us that from 17 August, 1902 to 17 May, 1903 this Association offered over 260 meetings up and down the country. Of Patrick Geddes, Jacqueline Tyrwhitt wrote a quarter of a century ago in her edition of his "Cities in Evolution":

"Geddes was not greatly preoccupied with the training of the expert. He was far more concerned that the ordinary citizen should have a vision and a comprehension of the possibilities of his own city. Thus Geddes lays all his emphasis on the need for a Civic Exhibition and a permanent centre for Civic Studies in every town—an Outlook Tower. This is something that, with all our discussions on the need for an value of 'citizen participation' in town planning, has yet to be given a trial."

Geddes was talking about public participation 70 years ago. Miss Tyrwhitt was talking about it 25 years ago. We, in our superficiality and arrogance, already regard it as last year's cure-all. "We tried it and it didn't work," someone said to me. Maybe we shall spend the next 25 years evolving a participatory system of planning. Maybe, too, we shall evolve a technique for do-it-yourself New Towns. Maybe the intractable crisis of the great cities will lead us to recognise that the dispersed polynuclear city, which we derive from Howard's concept of the Social City, is a good deal closer to popular aspirations than attempts to contain the city in its original form. Maybe, too, the very latest TCPA initiative, the Council for Urban Studies Centres, will realise Geddes' concern "that the ordinary citizen should have a vision and a comprehension of the possibilities of his own city".

I have already referred to the fact that in the ideology of planning there has always been a quieter, gentler, a more humane tradition than the one which has made the word "planner" a term of abuse and mockery among the general public. The gallery of this alternative tradition includes for me such names as Howard and Geddes, Mumford and Osborn, Unwin and Lethaby, and it is no accident that they have all been involved, some of them centrally of course, with this Association. What marvellous men they were! The last one I mentioned was William Richard

Lethaby, the first principal of the Central School of Arts and Crafts—his students there presented him with a bicycle on which he used to pedal to work, savouring the city on the way. In 1916 he gave an address on the art of Town Tidying. "Much study and research," he said, "have been devoted to the great question of town improvement from the point of view of planning of late years; but it is not of these technical or architectural matters that I want to speak. I want to speak of what should be the concern of ordinary people—all of us—with the common problems of life in towns."

"We need to make," he said, "an enthusiasm, a game, a movement" of town tidying. And by this he meant, he said, "the making of our towns fair and fit to live in from end to end, the whitewashing of back courts, the laying down of turf, the reducing of the advertisement mania, the smartening of the railway station, the seeing to it that there shall be some place in every town where decent food can be got . . ."

Notice the modest simple improvements he was asking for, none of them calling for a great programme of destruction and rebuilding or for a vast capital expenditure; calling instead for the involvement in his game of all citizens. We used to think we were rich and could do anything. Now (praise be!) the bottom is said to have fallen out of the property market, the energy crisis is adding a new dimension—"energy budgeting"—to our assessment of urban futures. Let me end with Lethaby's concluding words: "For the earlier part of my life I was quieted by being told that ours was the richest country in the world, until I woke up to know what I meant by riches was learning and beauty, and music and art, coffee and omelettes; perhaps in the coming days of poverty we may get more of these."

## MOVING ON

The man who remarked reflectively to Arthur Koestler "Maybe I've been licking the wrong boots all these years", put his tongue on one of the dilemmas of modern society: people move on. Frank Musgrove has examined the phenomenon of the migratory *élite* in terms of their personal life-style, but no one to my

*From Town and Country Planning, May 1975.*

knowledge has examined the effect on policy and its victims. Yet every sphere of social policy is affected, and to my mind vitiated, by the transitory commitment of its executants. It means that many of our assumptions about policies and about institutions are overturned, especially those that we make about the nature of specialist wisdom.

One notorious example is in education. At the school I attended in the 1930s, the teachers, once appointed, had a lifetime commitment to the place. Some of them became famous in the world of education, but they never thought of moving on. It was the County High School for Boys, Ilford, and if you think this was not one of our great seats of learning, you are probably right. But George W. Southgate, author of innumerable textbooks, taught history there for forty years, George Raine (father of Kathleen Raine, whose recent autobiography tells us how much she despised the place and its pupils), taught English there for thirty-eight years, and T. L. D. Porter (father of a family of celebrated scientists) taught chemistry there for thirty-nine years. Their record of job-longevity was not regarded as extraordinary: in more exalted schools it was the Mister Chips syndrome, but compare it with the situation in the typical secondary school in London today, where the teacher-turnover is such that the oldest inhabitants are, for the most part, the pupils. With their five-year minimum sentence, they have a longer staying-power than the majority of their mentors. In vain the hand-outs to parents in our giant London comprehensives declare that Mr. or Ms X will remain in a pastoral role as their children's tutor. The kids know that their school career will be longer than that of their teachers. The school, consequently, is not an institution but a service agency, like TV-repairing. This truth should profoundly influence our attitude to ideas like that of the community school. The community, at its most transient, is more stable than the institution that serves it.

The same is true of educational administration. No contemporary director of education can have the pioneering influence that Henry Morris had, as father of the village college idea, and grandfather of the community college, simply because none would be so neglectful of professional advancement as to stay put in rural Cambridgeshire.

Or take housing. There are certain trendsetters in housing policy whose opinions are valued by many of us. But the trouble is that they don't stay in office long enough to test out the policies they

have engendered. A few people in housing management have seen for a long time that tenant control is the only feasible future for municipal housing. One valued advocate of tenant involvement was director of housing in a London borough. But before he could begin the uphill and delicate task of bringing such a policy to fruition, he was whisked off to the doomed job of housing director for the Northern Ireland Executive, returning to become housing supremo for the GLC. In his own borough, his successor shared his views, but was lured away to the Housing Corporation. After him came his deputy who was whisked off to another London borough and after her, they brought in the chap from the borough next door. The turnover up above, in chairmen of housing committees, has been even more rapid, as has the turnover of staff down below. The whole municipal world is like this: a set of revolving doors, where the incumbent has just enough time to wave an encouraging hand to the successor, as each goes off at a tangent pursuing his career.

Small wonder that students conducting an investigation in another London borough, looking at empty sites, found that *nobody* in the town hall actually knew which ones belonged to the borough. Some zealot was slapping a CPO on a bit of property the council already owned. Only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches, and only the tenants know what the housing situation really is.

In planning, the transience of the decision-makers presents the biggest of all the challenges to the assumption of official wisdom. The progenitors of many of those great planning decisions of the 'fifties and 'sixties, whose destructive activities have been fought by community groups, have long since moved on to private practice as consultants, or to academic life, while their challengers are still fighting the discredited programmes they set in motion. This particular example is hardest to bear, when you observe that the expert who inaugurated the disastrous development plan for the city of X, now at last mercifully abandoned, is now earning vast fees from central government or from some middle-eastern potentate. Back there in Deadsville, the citizen objectors ("self-appointed spokesmen of the community, responsible to nobody but themselves" as planning departments often call them) are bewildered and resentful, as every day makes it plainer that they know the area and its problems in infinitely more detail than anyone in City Hall.

In a situation when parents and children, tenants and residents

have a far greater knowledge of and commitment to a place than the administrative machine, all policies are doomed which do not involve citizens.

Central government has not begun to recognize this as one of the facts of life. The legislators most certainly do not take it into account. Yet in the ordinary humdrum occupations which affect them, they must have noticed a certain lack of people willing to type their minutes, deliver their mail, and post their notices: the public equivalent of the private "servant problem" that beset the rich until they got used to it. Today we have a public servant problem: no job, high or low, is important enough to engage the long-term commitment of the officer-holder.

Instead of deploring this lack of dedication in others, shouldn't we welcome it, for the dethronement of expertise and the reliance on ordinary people's experience that it is bound to bring in its trail?

## 5. Dweller Control

### PROPERTY AND POWER IN THE URBAN JUNGLE

Audrey Harvey has worked for the last ten years in a Citizens' Advice Bureau in a poor London borough, and in the course of dealing with many thousands of problems and inquiries, has learned a great deal more than most of us about what it means to be defenceless and poor. In 1957, the year of the Rent Act, she wrote the first of many articles which, with detailed description and factual case-histories, opened the eyes of many well-housed people to the plight of the homeless in London, and in 1960 she wrote a pamphlet *Casualties of the Welfare State* (published by the Fabian Society, though the author explained that she was not a Fabian nor a Labour Party member, but "a radical in search of a party"). This essay was part of that barrage of criticism and exposure which helped to destroy the post-war myth of the Welfare State.

She wrote last autumn a Penguin Special *Tenants in Danger* which is in essence a guidebook for tenants to the tricks, deception, intimidation and swindles which the Rent Act of 1957 virtually invited their landlords to practise on them in the urban jungle. These became hot news because of the accidental revelations of the Rachman property scandals in 1963; but the "wicked landlord" as Audrey Harvey reminds us, is a permanent feature of the landscape of private property. He "has never really disappeared (he is called 'unscrupulous' now), nor could he be expected to do so. For property is inseparable from power, and rented property is

From *Peace News*, 29 January, 1965.

inseparable from power over other people's lives, and that sort of power tends to have a most unfortunate effect on the person who wields it, as anyone knows who has ever let a house."

Mrs. Harvey hopes that her testimony "may serve as some sort of record of what tenants of private landlords could and did suffer during what have so far been the blackest seven years in their postwar history: from 1957 to 1964," and certainly if unearthed a hundred years from now by a social historian, it will cause the same horrified amazement as we feel when reading of the enormities of the factory system in the early nineteenth century. The scholar will turn from the bland pronouncements of successive Housing Ministers and the apologetics of property owners to her experience and will have to admit that she, rather than they, is the unimpeachable witness, whose testimony convinces.

"And when, recently, the chairman of the National Federation of Property Owners maintained that private landlords do, in fact, provide a public service—and that this ought to be much more gratefully acknowledged by government and public alike—the occasion was not an altogether happy one: he had just suffered a compulsory purchase order on twenty of his East London blocks of flats because the rents charged had been found excessive and repairs had not been done."

*Tenants in Danger* is not, however, intended as a historical record, but as a weapon for the defenceless. Part of their defencelessness is the fact that they are bewildered and ill-informed, and Mrs. Harvey consequently begins with a chapter on how to get advice and information, following this with one on "how to detect and defeat trickery", a detailed list of danger signs. She concluded that the wicked landlord "is not to be exterminated by any superficial means. Put controls on him and he will find ways of slithering round at least some of them. Resist him defensively and he will still get his way with the tenant who is too old or ill or afraid to do anything but give in. Build more houses and he will still turn what remains of the so-called free market into an even blacker one than he has already done. As long as the soil and the climate are right for him, as they have been now for so long, his money will buy him acceptance. He will continue to exist—and so will homeless families—as long as land and rented houses remain in private hands."

Since her book was written, a Labour government has taken office, and Richard Crossman as Minister of Housing has inherited from his Conservative predecessors a legacy which, apart from the

Rent Act, includes the dismantling of the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act with its abortive provision for ending speculation in land values. The first action in this field taken by the new government has been the passage of the Protection from Eviction Act, now in force, which provides that a landlord cannot evict a tenant without the consent of the county court, which, if it gives him an order for possession may grant the tenant a period of grace of up to twelve months as well as specifying the rent to be paid. This Act is intended as an emergency stop-gap measure until a Bill for repealing the 1957 Rent Act can be introduced.

The intention of the impending Rent Act—which will be the twentieth—is, according to Labour's election manifesto, to "end further decontrol and restore security of tenure to those in already decontrolled flats and houses" and to "provide machinery for settling rents on a fair basis". Mr. Crossman's Bill is expected to attempt in fact to give security of tenure to all rent-paying tenants, whether of unfurnished private dwellings, furnished lettings, or council houses or flats.

To frame such legislation, especially to cover all circumstances of furnished lettings, is an incredibly complicated task, made even harder by the difficulty of establishing a concept of a "fair" rent, and of coping with the proliferation of tribunals and arbitration boards involved. To make it proof against the wiles of landlords and speculators is impossible.

The only real hope of success would be in a vast increase in the stock of dwellings available for rent at prices which an ordinary working man—let alone the old and ill—can afford. The number of houses rented privately is steadily diminishing. It is invariably the poorest, oldest and most inadequately equipped of all kinds of housing, and virtually no new houses or flats are being built for rent. As a result of the last Rent Act large numbers of houses which used to be let at working-class rents are now being sold at middle-class freehold prices. All this means that if electoral promises are to be fulfilled, an enormous low-rent housing programme must be initiated, but there is little sign of this on anything like the scale required.

As things stand local authorities have great financial problems because of the effect of interest rates on the cost of house-building. The rate at which loans are made by the Public Works Loans Board is fixed by the Bank Rate, which was kept at a (by present standards) low level until, when the Conservatives took office in

1951, the manipulation of Bank Rate became an instrument of economic policy. At the RIBA Conference in 1963, Lewis Womersley, then City Architect for Sheffield, produced figures to show that the economic rent of a house was made up of 17% for the cost of land, 15% on rates, 3% on maintenance, and 53% on servicing the loans. But instead of making cheap money available for housing, one of the first acts of the Labour government, in dealing with their latest financial crisis, was the standard Conservative measure of pushing up Bank Rate. When he visited Leeds on January 13, Mr. Crossman was told that the increase would cost Leeds Corporation £500,000 a year, and had caused them to defer their £3½ million development scheme, but all he had to say was that "Local authorities are going to face these difficulties".

During Labour's years out of office, part of its programme was for the municipalisation of private rented housing, a proposal which was unattractive especially to those floating voters in marginal constituencies upon whom electoral success ultimately depends, and was quietly dropped before the last general election; yet Mrs. Harvey concludes that nothing less than this would solve the problems of private landlords and exploited tenants. She points out that the restrictions on personal liberty that people fear if they are to "live under the council" are trivial compared with those frequently imposed by private landlords. "No council tenant ever gets notice to quit because his wife is expecting a baby." At the same time she points out the need for an "ombudsman" for council tenants, since "too great bureaucratic power is always dangerous and the insolence of office is a very dreadful thing".

Much more attractive to my anarchist eyes is the idea of an enormous growth of housing associations and housing co-operatives. Why, in comparison with most other European countries, do these provide such an infinitesimal proportion of housing in this country? The answer is that as things stand someone wealthy enough to rent a housing society house or flat would be someone paying income tax at a rate that would make it more financially attractive for him to become an owner-occupier with a twenty-year mortgage and claim tax-relief on the interest he pays. The only thing that would get the housing society movement off the ground in this country would be tax-relief and low-interest loans. Writing in the current issue of the *Housing Review*, Mr. Crossman declares that home ownership must not be forced on

people, particularly young married couples who may have difficulty in finding the money for a mortgage, and he calls for a proper balance between houses for sale and those for rent. If he means this, and after all exactly the same platitudes were spouted by the Tory ministers before him, he must bully the Chancellor to grant these two concessions to housing societies and to local authorities.

You don't have to be an economist of genius to see this, but I can perceive no such intentions in the new government, any more than I can see that it has more positive policies than the last one for coping with the "drift to the south-east" which adds to the problems of the south without solving those of the north. During his election campaign George Brown said that the Labour government would scrap the *South-East Study* which the Conservatives accepted as a basis for policy and would adopt new and dynamic policies for developing the North-East of England and Scotland, luring industry away from the London area. We have not been told what these proposals are, and it is now reported that the new session of Parliament will be asked to accept a report on the South-East essentially the same as that of the last government.

I believe in popular action rather than governmental action, and, in a situation in which people have surrendered the initiative to government, I think that the best substitute for popular action is popular pressure. The militancy which developed on the question of housing racketers when Labour was in opposition should not be allowed to evaporate simply because the Labour Party is now in office. We need, as Mrs. Harvey would point out, a strengthening of services like the Citizen's Advice Bureau, free, non-political and independent of state control, to help people overcome their ignorance of their rights. We need, as she pleads in *Tenants in Danger*, the innumerable people who read the book and are able to explain to the bewildered victims of racketeers what they can do, to become watchdogs for the exploited. We need a great barrage of sustained and informed public criticism and protest.

## PARTICIPATION OR CONTROL?

I ought to express my thanks to the chairman (Derek Fox) because in his stimulating paper on "Tenants' Participation" which you have before you, he has very adequately covered the first part of the argument I have undertaken to set out under the heading "Why Involve Tenants?". But isn't it profoundly depressing to look at the *date* on the long quotation which he puts at the head of his paper, from the PEP Broadsheet on *Councils and the Tenants*? That old broadsheet discusses the way in which "the movement of authority towards the centre will be a movement towards bureaucracy, even though the larger institutions remain formally democratic" and in terms of council housing, it remarks that "The council itself is sometimes resented as an omnipresence controlling almost every aspect of the tenants' lives. They feel that it is impossible for them to escape its tentacles: it controls not only the routine services which local authorities were originally established to provide, but also the schools to which the children go, the clinics and health centres, the community centre in which the tenants amuse themselves, and finally the houses in which they live."

That was published 26 years ago, and if we ask ourselves what progress we have made since 1948 in the direction of a participatory democracy, the answer is bound to be both depressing and disquieting. In 1948 thirteen per cent of households were in

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Address to the conference of the Housing Centre Trust on *Tenant Involvement in Housing Management* on 19 March, 1974. Printed in *Housing Review*, May-June 1974.

council tenancies, today the figure is over thirty per cent: a higher proportion than that in any other country in Western Europe (and for that matter in most of the countries of Eastern Europe). It's interesting, isn't it, that the 1948 report referred to the trend to transfer power from smaller to ever larger authorities, because of course that is just what looms up in front of us at the end of this month when the number of housing authorities will diminish from 1,200 to about 385. This is because central government has decided that Big is Beautiful, whereas it seems to me that all the evidence is to the contrary. Of course we shouldn't be surprised that the government thinks like that. It is always the central government that reports on local government. I never yet read a local government report on central government. The best housing authority I know is a rural district council where the man from the surveyor's department (innocent of training in housing management) collects the rent, adjusts the ball-valve and gives advice on broad beans, before peddling off. The best housing authority Andrew Gilmour knows is a small burgh in the lowlands of Scotland. Both are going to disappear. Of the old Metropolitan Borough of Bermondsey (long since amalgamated of course) it used to be said that "enquirers ask for the housing manager by his Christian name, and he in turn knows them by their Christian names". Totally inconceivable nowadays.

But this growing remoteness makes the issue of tenant involvement one of great urgency.

Ann Richardson, in her paper on the current state of tenant participation in London, points out that efforts to involve tenants could not be judged simply on *technical* criteria, but must be seen as *political* decisions. These efforts may be made for a variety of reasons, which may very well be incompatible with each other. She remarked that "tenant participation may be introduced as a means of increasing tenant control (power) over policy decisions affecting them. Or it may be introduced because it is thought that established policy goals may be achieved more efficiently if tenants are given a regular voice in the implementation process (making things work better). Or it may be introduced to give tenants an increased sense of involvement without necessarily affecting policy decisions very drastically (keeping people happy). Finally it may be introduced to ensure the representation of tenant views in council decision-making with an emphasis on due process rather than policy outcomes (democratic rights)."

The limiting factors in attempting to give actual decision-making powers to tenants are the provisions of the Local Government Acts which lay down that although "other persons" may be co-opted on to council committees, two thirds of the people who actually vote on questions of resource allocation (i.e., how the money is spent) must be elected members.

Here of course, is the weakness of every scheme for involving council tenants in an organisational system that was not designed for involvement. Councillors themselves often have the uneasy feeling that when it comes to deciding on the allocation of cash, they are the tools of policy laid down by precedent, or by the council's officers or by central government. How much more will this doubt assail the tenant representative? As in so many other fields the tenant delegate will feel that he or she is simply a victim of the administrative machine.

Discussing the schemes for tenant representation reported by Ann Richardson, Derek Fox remarks that without exception "these proposals seem to be essentially methods of improving communication with and representation of tenants, from the top (i.e., housing committee) downwards, rather than building up from the bottom (individual estates): a method of allowing tenants self-management of their own estates. Tenants are thus being asked to decide on matters affecting a group of estates (which consist of several thousand dwellings) rather than what is necessary for their own individual estate."

He is right. Tenant "consultation" and tenant "participation" are so obviously designed as a means of manipulating tenants in the interests of housing management, that it is no wonder that nobody takes them seriously. They are the shadow, rather than the substance, of tenant control, and the tenants themselves, knowing that real power lies elsewhere, are not fooled. If anything, these token gestures, because they are not taken seriously, merely discredit the idea that people are capable of managing their own environment.

There are two possible interpretations, in fact, of the present fumbling attempts at achieving tenant participation. They can either lead to disillusionment because they turn out to be remote from the tenants' real aspirations, or they can be seen as a training ground for genuine tenant control. There is an exact parallel in industry. All those works committees and councils are in the end discredited as a manipulative device. The difference is that while the ostensible objectives of capital and labour in

industry are irreconcilably opposed, the aims of the housing industry, for either management or tenants, are supposed to be the same: to provide people with homes. They are not irreconcilable.

The yardstick by which I measure every attempt to involve tenants is the question: is the eventual aim tenant control? Years ago I wrote "One quarter of the population live in the three and a quarter million dwellings owned by local authorities. But is there *one* municipal housing estate in this country in which the tenants have any control over and any responsibility for the administration of their estate, *their* environment?" The answer was No, and it still is, even though the proportion has increased in the intervening years from a quarter to a third.

What I want to see is the formation of a tenant co-operative housing society which will purchase the estate from the council: the simplest method being through a collective mortgage payment replacing individual rents. Or another way would be to drag in Lord Goodman and his millions—if he gets them. I would like to use your expertise to see how we can overcome the difficulties inherent in this proposal.

There are a number of objections to the tenant take-over which ought to be taken seriously. Some of them are perfectly valid, and are best answered not by denying them but by pointing out that the advantages which the tenant take-over would bring, both to tenants and to society as a whole through a more efficient use of the nation's housing stock, are certainly greater than the disadvantages. The objections are:

1. *That the tenant take-over would permanently withdraw the affected houses and flats from the housing stock available to local housing authorities.*

This is the objection most frequently raised by councillors, both to purchases of houses by individual tenants and the transfer to tenant co-operatives. One can sympathise with housing departments desperate for room to manoeuvre in attempting to cope with their queues for housing. One way to reconcile the tenant take-over with a council's desire to keep "re-lets" in the pool would be to form a tenants' co-ownership housing society, but with the council retaining nomination rights. This is in fact the suggestion made by Trevor MacMurray. He regrets that "political constraints unfortunately preclude nomination rights". I would conclude that if you deny tenants themselves nomination rights in a tenant co-operative you immediately create a contentious

issue between the society and the council precisely because the tenants would regard it as yet another proof that their independence was spurious.

I would approach this objection from a different angle, stressing first of all that while the housing in the tenant take-over would cease to be at the disposal of the council, it is foolish to suggest that it is lost to the pool of housing for the population as a whole. The houses still exist. They provide homes for families. If the families were richer they would, no doubt, be house-hunters in the owner-occupation side of the market. If they move from the estate, their place is taken by other families, and those other families are effectively removed from the waiting list. In other words, nothing is lost.

And this is the important point, because when we look at what actually happens, rather than what ought to happen, we can see that in the normal council housing situation, a great deal is lost, firstly because of premature dereliction and secondly because of the total collapse, in some places, of landlord-tenant relations. The second point is difficult to illustrate without offending against our British libel laws, but there are an appalling number of illustrations of the first instance. I addressed a conference of the Institute of Landscape Architects at which David Kwiatowski of the Scottish Special Housing Association described its rehabilitation programme for municipal estates, some of which were only twelve years old. It is inconceivable that, in a situation of tenants control these estates could have declined at this rate. Similarly in the book I edited on *Vandalism* I illustrated a block of flats in the Liverpool hinterland in a state of advancing dereliction which only seventeen years earlier had won a national design. If the tenants had had a stake in the property could they possibly have let this happen?

It is not only the effective life-span of council housing which is shortened in some cases, I would maintain, by the lack of tenant involvement, but also its effective use. I have already mentioned the *stigma* which attaches to some estates. Many large authorities have unlettable houses or flats at the same time as they have long waiting lists. People who aren't in touch with housing realities cannot imagine how this can be so. In these circumstances the tenant take-over is probably the only way left to change the way in which the estate is perceived by both residents and outsiders. There are some instances where I am quite sure that it would be better for the council to give the estate to its tenants!

This is why I would claim that the tenant take-over would actually result in a net housing gain.

2. *That no-one knows what would happen to the estate when the loan is finally paid off.*

This is not true. The National Federation of Housing Societies has answered the question thus:

"Within the law at the present time the answers are fairly straightforward. Firstly, when the mortgage is repaid the society or association will own the unencumbered property. The association is owned by the shareholders who are also the tenants and members at that time and it is they, and they alone, who may make the decision on their future.

"Their choice is fairly simple. They may continue just as they are, occupying their particular portion of the property on the same conditions, but what they need to pay as 'rent' will, of course, need to be revised. There is now no mortgage repayment required, therefore this portion of their 'rent' would not have to be charged. They have to decide amongst themselves what charge is necessary for the maintenance and the running of the property. Also, they would have to reconsider what payment should be made to an outgoing member when he left.

"The second possibility is that the association could now grant to all the member occupiers a long term lease on that property, subject to a service charge and the other normal conditions. In this case any individual member, if and when he wanted to leave the property, may now sell the remaining years of that lease for its market value, subject to the purchaser being accepted by the association as a member."

3. *That it is wrong for people to make a private profit from housing in which public money has been invested.*

This question considers the sum paid out to members who leave the society, or the possibility of members profiting from some ultimate sale of the property. People in the voluntary housing movement have in mind the (isolated) case of a co-ownership housing society in North London whose members agreed among themselves to sell the whole property, and made a handsome profit on the deal. The period of co-ownership was in fact used by the members as a means of capital accumulation for individual owner-occupation.

I find myself out of sympathy with this question, not through any love of the profit motive, but through an uneasy feeling that there is hypocrisy in the air. Like the rest of that half of the

population who are owner-occupiers I have seen my house increase in value through no effort on my behalf, while the Commissioners of Inland Revenue have relieved from tax the interest I paid on the money I borrowed. In fact the annual increase in the value of my house has been greater than my annual earnings. I regard this situation as socially pernicious but I have certainly profited by it. Why should I adopt a different attitude to people involved in the tenant take-over who would otherwise spend a lifetime paying rent for their housing and in old age have nothing to show for it but a full rent book? (As to those graduate members of the socialist intelligentsia who raise this objection: more public money has been expended on one year of their university life than on the whole school lifetime of most council tenants—and haven't they profited from this expenditure?)

I would certainly like to live in a society where increases in property values accrued, not to individuals, but to the community which generated them, but in the meantime I have to be content with urging some measure of equal justice between the two main sectors of the housing market.

4. *That large numbers of people, particularly the young and mobile, do not want a house they can cherish, they simply want to be able to rent decent accommodation without being bothered by administrative matters.*

Perfectly true. What is wanted is what we haven't got today: freedom of choice in tenure. It is inconceivable that *all* municipal housing would be turned over to tenant co-operatives. But it is just as incredible that in the whole municipal third of the housing market, there should not have been a single experiment in tenant control, which is the situation we have today.

6. *That tenant selection in the hands of a tenants' association would discriminate against the poor and disadvantaged.*

They might. But the assumption behind the question is that local authorities themselves do not. And the truth is that the most disadvantaged of families are found in the private landlord sector. The same is true of coloured families.

Elizabeth Burney in her chapter on "How to keep clean and win a council house" remarks that "coloured council tenants are frequently regarded as a political liability and an administrative risk. They embody, in the eyes of the authorities, the 'awkward case' which they would rather not handle."

More recently, the report published last year by PEP called *The Fair Housing Experiment* indicated that the situation had

not changed in this respect. The truth is that public attitudes on housing and race are shared by both council officers, councillors and the public at large. The problem is one of changing public attitudes, but it shouldn't stand in the way of an experiment in the tenant takeover.

7. *The tenants' associations tend to be dominated by extremists and by people with a political axe to grind.*

Well as an extremist myself I am sensitive to this one, but I think that the answer to the objection is that it is one thing to be an extremist in opposition and quite another to be an extremist in a situation of self-government, where you *have* to carry majority opinion with you. As to political axes: they have been ground from time immemorial in council housing politics. The same director of housing who has to speak up in favour of selling council houses to sitting tenants one week, has to oppose such measures as anti-social the next, on account of a swing in the ruling party in his council.

8. *That the necessity to pay a "premium" to outgoing members of the society and to charge a consequently large "deposit" will either destroy the financial viability of the scheme or restrict entry to the better-off.*

This is an interesting and serious objection. There are plenty of people—some in this hall—who support the idea of tenants' control but think there is something wrong about tenants gaining "a stake in the equity", of gaining some financial advantage from their tenure. I think this is, as I have suggested, the kind of puritan ethic we apply to other people but not to ourselves. The practical answer is that any scheme for giving tenants responsibility, without giving them some tangible reward for this is *bound* to be seen as a manipulative device for shrugging off the burden (and it is going to be a growing burden in the future) of maintenance, without any concomitant benefit. Giving them the kicks without the ha'pence. But there are two further difficulties here. The first is that, for the tenant who sees co-ownership as one stage in the housing ladder, leading to owner-occupation, the "premium" to outgoing members may seem to be not commensurate with the benefit obtainable by the owner occupier who sells. The second is that for others—the more permanently rooted members, it may seem too much. To investigate this problem in the field of co-ownership housing societies, Lord Goodman has commissioned a study of the present structure. I think he is not optimistic about the results, but I don't know from

what point of view his investigator is looking at this point.

In co-ownership housing societies promoted by the corporation, there is a formula for calculating the payment to be made. After three years (it used to be five) the tenant gets

1. return of deposit (equivalent of 3-4 months rent),
2. a proportion of his contribution to
  - (a) the amortisation of capital (never more than 80%),
  - (b) the valuation element.

Incoming tenants obviously pay a bigger contribution, just as new mortgagees in the owner-occupation sector, have bigger monthly outgoings than earlier ones.

Years ago I was present at the AGM of the National Federation of Housing Societies where the lady acting as arbitrator for a self-build housing society described how this problem was dealt with in that context. She said

"We took the value of the house from the time the man entered it until the time when he was compelled to leave due to his job having been changed. We did deem that the money and the labour which he had put into that shell, if you like, to improve it quite rightly should be his profit. We felt that it was his own personal effort, and not that of the association or the group.

"However, the other profit which was made over and above that second valuation was divided between that man and his housing association. We felt, again, that part of that extra money was due to the man for his goodwill (the goodwill which he put into the association by being a good member), and he was entitled to something for his labour. We felt that some of it was due to the members for their goodwill as far as he was concerned. We came to a very happy and amicable arrangement . . . We have never had a squabble. We have never had an argument over the settlement at all."

9. *That the disposal of some estates, because of the pooling of subsidies, will aggravate the problems of the housing accounts of those authorities which own both old and new properties.*

It will. From a legislative point of view this issue of the subsidy basis is so fluid at the moment that there is nothing I can usefully say about it. I will content myself with saying that it seems to me totally iniquitous that tenants of old council property should be saddled with the unsought responsibility for subsidising the grossly inflated costs of new accommodation. If they knew the situation they would groan every time they saw a new council building site.

10. *That all this discussion of transferring the amortisation of the estate from the council to its tenants is firstly reactionary because it enslaves tenants to the money market and secondly misleading because the strongest weapon in the hands of the tenants is the fact that they live there. If they want control of the estate they should withhold rent and seize it!*

It would certainly save a lot of tedious calculation if we could count on tenant militancy to do the trick, but the possibilities, short of a revolutionary situation, are not great. It did not need Clay Cross to demonstrate that in view of the powers of the district auditor and of central government over housing, it needs more than local direct action to win.

I have a friend who maintained that in the Kirkby rent strike the correct strategy would be to declare Kirkby a "No-Go Area", to take effective control of the place, using the local human resources for social services and a free school, and developing a community industry, serving local needs. This would have been a tenant take-over indeed. The division of interest between the tenants, those who were in receipt of some form of social security benefit and those who were not, those who were committed to militancy and those who were not, those who feared eviction and those who did not, guaranteed a situation in which the "leaders" were imprisoned while others went on paying, or withholding, rent as though nothing had happened.

Like any other political struggle, the tenant take-over depends on three different levels of activity, that of militancy, that of "encroaching control", and that of pragmatic negotiation.

11. *That the tenant take-over presupposes and exalts the virtues of ownership, while in a desirable social order private ownership of real property would not exist.*

I agree. I agree too that householders, whether owners paying back mortgage loans or tenants, the greater part of whose rent goes in interest payments, are both victims of our economic system. I believe in social ownership of social assets, but I think it a mistake to confuse society with the state. Co-operative ownership seems to me to be a better concept of social ownership than ownership by the state or by the municipality. But in pragmatic terms since we have reached a point where the majority of dwellings are owner-occupied, I want to extend the benefits that accrue to the owner-occupier to the tenant.

12. *That a great deal of education will be needed before we achieve tenant control.*

It is true. Before you start a co-operative society you have to have some grasp of co-operative principles. Any tenants' association that takes the idea seriously would have to set out on a long campaign of education and propaganda. On the other hand the quickest, and the only way, to learn responsibility is to accept it. Harold Campbell would draw the analogy of the Rochdale Pioneers retailing sugar in the front parlour and holding evening classes in English, arithmetic and book-keeping in the back kitchen. And in 1973/4, for the first time ever, the Education Department of the Co-operative Union in hundreds of discussion groups up and down the country in preparation for its National Consumer Conference, ventilated the issue of Tenant Control. They have been doing this through the very sound educational techniques of role-playing and simulation. This is exactly what the advocates of tenant control in tenants' associations should be doing. (One funny thing is that in those countries where co-operative housing, rather than municipal housing, provides one third of housing, people say they learned from this country's example, meaning the tradition of the Rochdale Pioneers and early, half-forgotten experiments in co-operative co-partnerships.)

But equally, Housing Managers and their staffs must re-educate themselves. It is very significant that the latest, revised, 1973 edition of the housing manager's bible, Macey and Baker's *Housing Management*, contains not a word about tenant consultation, or tenant participation, let alone tenant control. Most of all, perhaps, the members of housing committees must re-educate themselves and ask themselves the question, "Whose houses are they—theirs or ours?"

## IT WON'T WORK WITHOUT DWELLER CONTROL

Today we are considering the government's new legislation on Housing Action Areas. What are the lessons to be drawn from our session yesterday on General Improvement Areas? I think they are perfectly clear. Jim Grove described his populist, popular and practical approach to GIAs and underlined his important principle: "Sovereignty over decisions must lie with the inhabitants." These were his words, and he was followed by Chris Whitaker who said he was looking forward to the acceptance of the principle that GIAs should be declared "where the residents themselves know what they want". They should only be put into effect as a result of local demand.

Lawrence Hansen of Waltham Forest talked of the need to "help people with their perceived housing problems" and made the very significant remark that *house improvements have value only as perceived by the occupants*. And Robert Davis of Bromley remarked that council officers have a very different perception of needs to that of residents, who very often demand not physical things like trees and street improvements, but an improvement of ordinary municipal services (refuse collection, street cleaning, etc.) in the locally-determined sector—which are the very improvements which councils cannot provide. What are we to learn from Susan Howard's tragic-comic account of the first General

Address to the Town and Country Planning Association's conference on Housing Action—The Opportunities and Dangers, 19 June, 1974.

Improvement Area in Leicester? The first lesson ought to be that of *humility*. Municipal enterprise is a very blunt instrument.

One of the most important observations made yesterday was Jim Grove's remark that the lessons of the experience of General Improvement Areas have *not* been built into the Housing Action legislation in the new Housing Bill. He went on to qualify this by saying that there is a limit to what can be written into the law itself. The Mayor of Peterborough remarked at the last housing conference I attended, that housing management could only be as good as the people at the top. I pointed out then, and I want to do so again, that he was wrong: it is only as good as the people at the bottom. It's no use blaming the Minister for not giving us the legislation we want, if the legislation we've got is going to be applied stupidly and inflexibly at the level of the street.

I want to make the plain assertion that we don't have a housing problem: only a poverty problem, which housing improvements are not going to remedy. Throughout history every city has had its "zone of transition" as the geographers call it, which, needless to say, is our area of acute housing stress. Is it our ambition to turn every zone of transition into a Housing Action Area? If it is, are we ready to accept the fact that in improving it will be *creating* homelessness? Unless, that is, we accompany our improvements with a radical redistribution of wealth, which I don't see on the agenda today.

The traditional unplanned city had a *fine grain*: there was always at some level or another, a space for everyone. But the doss-houses, common lodging houses, Rowton Houses and other forms of cheap lodging are rapidly being upgraded or planned out of existence. The planned, re-developed, improved city is *coarse-grained*: it admits only a restricted range of citizens. Efforts to make things better will only make things worse for the people at the bottom of the pile. This will be the unwelcome though predictable result of extending the rent acts to furnished lodgings.

We heard a lot yesterday about draconian measures. Some people were for them and some were against them. Some councillors got up with a gleam in their eyes to say that when circumstances demand it they can be as draconian as the next chap. Well I don't even know what the word means, but when I keep hearing it, I reach for my copy of *Community Action*. We have had twenty years of draconian housing policy and you can go and look at Central Liverpool and see what happens when the draconian political will to *raze* has outstripped the financial and

organisational capacity to *rise*. There are enough draconian people in the world to ruin three planets of the same dimensions, and the fact that housing policy is in ruins is the result of what we might call unilateral draconianism: an approach which involves government, but does not involve people, who are simply the *objects* of policy.

Since I am to be followed by the Minister, who will certainly describe the opportunities provided by the Housing Bill, while this afternoon Mr. Chris Holmes will discuss its implementation, there is every reason for me to concentrate on the dangers.

The Bill, as we all know, is substantially the same as the last Government's Housing and Planning Bill, and Mr. Crosland has assured us that "teeth" will be inserted into it at the committee stage. When the Bill in its original form was given a second reading in the House of Commons, Mr. Dick Leonard (and many people will regret that he is not in the present House since he was a persistent advocate of the rights of tenants) remarked that there was one glaring omission: it provided no new safeguards for council and housing association tenants. Now although the present Bill will embody more safeguards for private tenants, it does nothing to implement the Charter of Rights for council tenants that Mr. Leonard with all-party support tried several times to introduce as a private member's bill, nor, despite the detailed attention the Bill pays to the expansion of the voluntary housing movement, does it make any provision for the safeguarding of tenants' rights or the introduction of tenant representation in housing associations.

But how can I make this criticism when the whole intention of the Bill is to increase the stock of decent housing available for rent, to increase the pace of rehabilitation, and to rescue private tenants from insecurity, exploitation and neglect? If it isn't for the sake of tenants, who is it for? And why, of all possible criticisms of the new Housing Bill and of the DOE Circular 70/74, do I raise this one?

Six months ago, at the last TCPA Conference devoted to housing matters, the Minister presented his views, as an Opposition spokesman at that time, and on the same occasion Lord Goodman addressed us on his hopes for the Housing Corporation, ending in his quizzical way, with the remark that "It is only in a society where we have a government working day and night in our behalf that the housing problems are insoluble." According to the press reports, Lord Goodman's quip was greeted with "roisterous applause". Now why did that audience, which must

have been composed, like the present one, of people with a professional, or an academic, or a philanthropic concern with housing, who know just what the situation is, what the appalling difficulties are—why did that audience cheer his remark?

I suspect it is because we recognised that housing policy had collapsed, that the official ideology of housing is discredited, that the Housing Problems Industry is bankrupt. In Britain 1973 saw the lowest rate of house-building for decades. It is customary to blame this on ruinous building costs, interest rates or land prices, or to blame it on the party in power. But it is not a party matter, and it is not confined to this country. In the United States, after the same bewildering succession of programmes and statutes as we have had (in America they have had Public Housing, Urban Renewal, Model Cities, Operation Breakthrough, Rent Supplements, Housing Allowances, etc.), 1973 was the year of the Nixon Moratorium—the withdrawal of Federal housing aid. Even in Sweden, a country whose housing achievements are regarded as exemplary, a recent report says, "with the sweeping review of general State housing aid . . . the way ahead is clouded with uncertainties and confusion . . ."

In this country we are not withdrawing central government aid. We are increasing it, even if not to the extent which local government would wish. Can we say with any confidence that it will be used effectively? No doubt many people here saw the television film a month ago made by Don Haworth called *The Corporation and the People*. It was a study of re-housing from the familiar doomed terraces of the inner city to the new "medium-rise" flats on the periphery: a story that could be told in every city in Britain.

The move resulted in a changed perception of the housing situation in both the subjects and the objects of the rehousing policy. An aggrieved tenant remarked "They don't look up to you like they did in the old areas. They're the officials and they let you know they're the officials." And an exasperated officer of the housing department said, "They weren't like this when they lived in the streets. God love us, when they want their shoelaces tying they want one of us to go round and tie them for them."

The film accurately reflected the stages in the rehousing process, starting with the rehousing officer's visit to the occupants, some desperate to move, some willing—provided that they could choose their destination, some bewildered as to why *their* homes could be considered in any way inadequate. Down at the housing office,

the lady who didn't want to move declares her preference, but is told "You can't go there because there are a lot of clearance areas before yours", as though *she* had wanted to join the clearance queue.

Once the residents were installed on the new estate, there were the predictable complaints from both sides. The most revealing comment was made by the resident social worker (sic) who said, "This woman comes back from work to find the Parks Department had put a tree in her garden. Hers just happened to be the every-other-house that gets a tree in the garden."

There is in fact a kind of ideology of tenantry which has grown out of the imposition of dependency and the denial of responsibility. A Labour councillor said to me with a kind of resigned irritation, "Do you know, we have people on the waiting list who turn down everything except a brand new flat". A city solicitor said, "We have people who are well off, but on principle won't pay the rent, and know that we won't evict them." And a maintenance surveyor told me with quiet venom, "If you gave them a palace, they'd still grumble."

I don't find these comments a bit surprising. We have preached for years the gospel that housing is a social service, and at the same time have closed all the possibilities of self-help except owner-occupation, while restricting this to the kind of properties and incomes that attract mortgage loans. And we have made it impossible for people to improve dwellings over time, at their own pace and in their own way. Improvement grants (denied of course to the residents of clearance areas) have been a hand-out to the speculator, but the poor householder they might have helped has been, in case after case, ruled out because the grants demand too high a standard in too short a time (and involve him in the payment of professional fees way beyond his income).

Similarly the housing applicant who waits for a brand-new flat, knows that if he accepts anything less, *he* would not be able to improve whatever else he is offered. The conscientious objector to paying his rent is very well aware that the greater part of it pays, not for the dwelling, but for the interest charges on the money borrowed to build, not just it, but the whole of the council's housing stock. The chronic grumbler, engaged in a continual battle of wits with the housing manager, knows how hard it is to get anything done at all, and he knows too, that whatever the *tenant* does is wrong.

It isn't to be wondered at that in Mr. Howarth's film, an

officer of the housing department complained that "They used to take a pride in their doorsteps. Now they expect *us* to keep them clean." Mr. Howarth said that his final impression of the estate was one not of strident anger but of plaintive lethargy. It is this resignation which explains, not only the inability of maintenance departments to catch up with the demands made on their services, but also the cycle of decline that begins even before the new estate is occupied. Every major housing authority in this country has post-war housing which is unoccupiable, either because of its physical dereliction or because of the stigma attached to it.

Meanwhile, on the other side of town, owner-occupied housing, whether it is sub-Parker Morris ticky-tacky or gentrified cottages, is continually improved by its occupants. They are plagued neither by interminable breakdowns of mechanical services nor by the depredations of the vandals. The difference between them and the council tenants has two characteristics. The first is that they have control of and responsibility for their own environment, and the second is that they have a financial stake in it: it is their best, and usually their most profitable, investment. Especially since inflation which penalises the tenant, benefits the owner-occupier.

The only solution I can see to the malaise of the municipal estate is to transform it into a co-operative housing society. There are formidable psychological and financial obstacles to doing this, as well as political and legal ones. Let me sketch out some of these.

1. A lot of people are attracted by the idea of tenants taking over responsibility for the estate, but have a rooted objection to the transfer of ownership, and the consequence that the tenant must have some kind of bounty from the society's funds if and when he moves out. It certainly complicates the issue, but I think it can't be avoided in a society where over fifty per cent of us take it for granted that we have in our houses a capital asset of ever-increasing value. Moreover any scheme for tenant control which did not include the financial betterment would certainly be seen by tenants as an attempt by councils to throw off the responsibilities of landlordism while giving nothing in return.

2. Discussion of this issue is plagued by ideology. It should not be. There are supporters and opponents of tenant control in all three major political parties. (Interestingly enough, in the so-called people's democracies, this is not seen as an ideological issue as in most of them the individual home is not seen as

real property but as personal property. And funnily enough, in Romania, the decree went forth a couple of months ago that tenants *must* purchase their houses or flats, or face a 100% rent increase!)

3. From a legal and financial point of view, the difficulty is that at present valuations, the repayments on a collective mortgage for the estate are likely to be way above the level of rents, though if such schemes had been launched in say 1968, tenants would probably be paying less today in repayments monthly, than they are in current rents. Under section 104 of the Housing Finance Act, co-owners are not eligible for the "fair rent" scheme. Whether or not they will be for anything that replaces it remains to be seen. In fixing the transfer price a local authority must use the district valuer's assessment of current market value, subject to a 10 or 20 or in very rare cases a 30% discount. If a council or its tenants take the idea seriously there is everything to be said for an approach to the Secretary of State for some dispensation to reach a compromise between historic cost and current market value, to make the scheme feasible for the tenants.

I believe that, ideology apart, what will drive councils into considering the possibilities of tenant co-operatives as an alternative to municipal control is the crisis of maintenance to which I will refer later. It is very significant that in the city of Oslo, where the transfer of housing to tenant co-operatives was exhaustively studied by my friend Andrew Gilmour, it was the Council's inability to cope with its maintenance commitments: and the transfer price took this into account. Today the Oslo estates are transformed and when a flat becomes vacant, people clamour for the chance to get in. Now these are flats which, if they belonged to a British city, would be awaiting demolition as obsolete, or because the stigma attached to them was so great that the block was already half empty. This is not because the housing shortage is any worse in Oslo than in a British city, it is because tenant control has arrested the decline in the perceived value of the property.

The Oslo flats were built between 1913 and 1930. Most of the inner London boroughs have thousands of flats dating from that period, many of them inherited from the GLC and built in the inter-war period. Where I live, in the London Borough of Wandsworth, we have such an estate, which our Council is determined to demolish and replace (in spite of the objections

of the Department of the Environment). The interesting thing is that, if they were in the private sector, these flats, only fit for demolition, would be energetically sought after. I was told last month that in Stockholm, there are 30,000 empty municipal flats, while in the old inner city, dark, ill-ventilated sub-standard flats change hands at very high prices. There's a message somewhere.

Now you might think that, whatever the difficulties inherent in changing the situation in the existing municipal third of the market, we would take care to engineer a situation of tenant involvement in new housing policy.

Here, especially as we are all now marching under the banner of rehabilitation and improvement rather than of wholesale destruction of sub-standard housing, is the opportunity to learn from past errors. And it is here that I see the dangers that we are failing to do so.

The Department of the Environment has issued to local authorities its circular on *Local Authority Housing Programmes* urging them to find ways and means of increasing their housing stock, by taking over unsold housing from private builders, by employing small contractors on their own contracts, and by increasing the pace of taking private rented property into "social ownership". In this circular the Department emphasises, as Mr. Freeson did in giving us his views as Opposition spokesman last year, that both housing associations and tenants' co-operatives have a part to play in its proposals for social ownership.

The tone of the circular is that of a call for more imaginative improvisation by local authorities to make a more efficient use of existing housing stocks. But do the constraints and traditions of local authority housing departments lead us to believe that they *can* adopt the looser and more flexible approach implied in the DOE circular? For London the answer is bound, I am afraid, to be No. The GLC and a number of the London boroughs have been buying houses in the open market for several years, for the best of reasons, but have been exposed recently to awkward questions about the number of dwellings at their disposal which remain empty for a considerable period. In my own Borough it is reported that "the housing committee, considering the list of 128 properties in council ownership which have been unoccupied for more than a year, were deeply concerned at the position which has been unexpectedly revealed . . . The committee were told that it takes an average of 19 weeks to prepare an estimate and specification and many more weeks before a contractor can

carry out the job. The Council is now buying properties for the 'housing pool' at a rapid rate, but so far it has not been possible to cope with the necessary repairs to houses already owned. Unless some procedure can be found, the backlog of vacancies could become an even greater embarrassment . . ."

Now if that Council follows the advice of the Minister's circular this embarrassing log-jam of purchased but unoccupied and unrehabilitated properties is simply going to increase. There is a crisis of maintenance, renovation and repair in the public sector of housing, through lack of labour, and through the inflexibility of procedures, as well as because of the obligation to meet Housing Act, Public Health Act and Parker Morris standards. There is no such crisis in the owner-occupier sector where, through his own labour or that of jobbing builders or "moonlighting" tradesmen, maintenance and improvements are under the dweller's control, and their nature, pace and priority are decided by him. What is so hard for the council is very easy for him, while, paradoxically, lower standards often give greater satisfaction.

There is an urgent need to evolve a new mode of tenure which, as Harold Campbell, a veteran advocate of co-operative housing put it years ago, "combines private enterprise and mutual aid in a unique form of social ownership which puts a premium on personal responsibility and individual initiative". Undoubtedly this is what Mr. Freeson means by a tenants' co-operative too. But is there anyone in the Department of the Environment, or in the Housing Department of any local authority, with an approved model constitution or a book of rules for such a co-operative, or a formula for giving it "a stake in the equity" which is the indispensable *quid pro quo* if it is to take over from the council responsibility for maintenance and improvement? I am not thinking of housing associations (many of which in London are just as paternalistic and as incapable of coping with rehabilitation as the local authorities) nor am I thinking of co-ownership housing societies, which have been pushed out of the low-cost housing market by the inflation of prices. (Lord Goodman told me in April that the last co-ownership scheme to pass through the Housing Corporation involved weekly payments of £36 a household.)

I was present last month at the annual general meeting of a Tenants' and Residents' Association—in the London Borough of Camden—who feel no more in control of their destiny under their

new landlords, a Housing Association—than they did under their former succession of speculative would-be developers. There is as urgent a need to democratise the so-called voluntary housing movement as there is in the municipal sector. There are honourable exceptions—like Solon Housing Association in South London—but there are at the same time legal difficulties in giving tenants a controlling interest, even in those few associations which think it desirable.

As to the Housing Corporation, I am sure that everyone here will wish it well in its newly enhanced status under the Bill. But I am equally sure that Lord Goodman and his associates have misread the situation if they believe that their over-riding priority should be quantitative: to increase the total supply of housing available for rent. They should be setting their sights higher and seizing the opportunity open to them, with a somewhat greater freedom of manoeuvre than the local authorities, to explore and experiment with new modes of housing tenure which give the tenants a part to play in the housing process. When I raised these doubts at a meeting of the Housing Centre Trust, two officers of the Corporation assured me that they *are* seeking a financial model for tenant involvement, and that they are trying to develop a structure for a fair-rent association to have its shares owned exclusively by the occupiers. If the parliamentary draughtsmen could work some provision of this kind in the legislation that is to succeed the Housing Finance Act, they will have facilitated experiments that are at present impossible.

The cities of the Eastern seaboard of the United States are sponsoring programmes of "urban homesteading" or "sweat-equity" for self-help rehabilitation of empty property. The nearest London equivalent would be the squatters, who put in the sweat but don't get the equity. Last autumn, at the invitation of the then chairman of the housing committee, the Camden squatters put up proposals to one of the London boroughs for self-help rehabilitation. The council has in principle adopted the idea, though in its pilot scheme it has whittled it down, do-it-yourself decoration with a five-year loan in houses given "on licence" to tenants. The recent test case involving short-life compulsorily purchased housing in Salford, where the magistrate has ordered the Council to remedy defects under the Public Health Acts, illustrates the dilemma that faces councils who do try to make an intelligent use of available but sub-standard dwellings, unless they take the bold step of helping tenants to help themselves.

By this I don't mean that I think that the harassed and down-trodden tenants of Housing Action Areas can instantly become do-it-yourself handymen, but I do mean that if the nature, extent and pace and priority of rehabilitation, could be under the control of the dweller, some of the expensive and insensitive experiences of the last few years could be avoided. The further we are from this ideal, the fewer the hopes of success in housing action areas.

## AFTER TENANTS TAKE OVER

It is a particular pleasure for me to follow John Turner, because he and I and the Italian architect Giancarlo de Carlo began a debate on housing in the nineteen-forties in the anarchist newspaper *Freedom*, and our friendship was cemented when we met a quarter of a century ago in Venice. On that occasion John Turner first encountered the Peruvian architect Eduardo Neira, who a few years later gave him the chance to work in the squatter settlements of Lima. Many years' experience in Latin America, the United States and elsewhere in the world have led him to enunciate his axiom of dweller control, which I regard as the first principle of housing.

We are in fact preaching not new thinking, but very old and neglected thinking about housing, and I was interested to learn that when, earlier this year, Professor de Carlo paid a flying visit to the University of Edinburgh and students said to him, "What do you recommend us to read?" he didn't reply "Read Corbusier," nor did he reply "Read Parker Morris." He replied "Read Kropotkin." For myself, when I had the opportunity of addressing the Peterborough Conference of the Housing Centre Trust a little

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Address to the National Conference of the Housing Centre Trust on *New Thinking in Housing* on 19 June, 1975 at the Royal Institute of British Architects.

over a year ago, setting out my views on the need to transfer the control of municipal housing from councils to tenants, I was (according to a full and fair report in the *Municipal Journal*) "greeted with astonishment and disbelief in most quarters". But only a few months later, when my book *Tenants Take Over* came out, the *Royal Institute of British Architects Journal* declared that it made "the anarchist philosophy in the housing field not merely respectable, but also thoroughly practical and economic".

I found this gratifying of course, but I mention it to indicate how very rapidly our perceptions of housing issues are changing. The reason why opinions of people like us have suddenly become interesting is that official housing policy has become not only financially but also ideologically bankrupt. I put it this way because I know there are people in the audience who think that the root of our troubles is simply that we don't devote enough of the nation's income to housing and that if only we could persuade the legislators to spend more, everything would be fine. To them it must seem that Turner and I, and for that matter Rod Hackney, because of the small scale of the self-help rehabilitation at Black Road, Macclesfield, are all irrelevant to the real issues, and may even be some kind of smoke-screen to gloss over the fact that there isn't any cash left in the housing till.

They will talk no doubt of the need for a National Plan for housing. Well, all my life politicians have been talking about a national plan for housing. When I was a child, forgotten ministers like Neville Chamberlain and Kingsley Wood made eloquent calls for a National Plan for housing. When I was a young man we had a lot of eloquence from Aneurin Bevan, and following him we had Harold Macmillan with a National Plan. In fact it was when he was the Minister in 1952, when in order to spread the cash further, provide the mostest dwelling units and so on, he imposed the cuts in standards from those instituted by the wartime Dudley Report; and it was in that year that we discussed in Venice with Giancarlo de Carlo the kind of issue which in different ways has preoccupied us ever since: and concerns us here today. I remember de Carlo's rhetoric on this point. "The home" he declared, "is man's affirmation in space." But what kind of sense would that make to people who see it as a statistic? "People have" he said, "to *attack* their environment, to make it their own." Not on this estate, they don't, the hard-pressed maintenance officer would reply.

But in citing de Carlo's existential view of the role of housing

in people's lives, can I simply dismiss the statistics that tell us for example that half this country's population live in owner-occupied housing, thanks to government policies of remission of income tax on mortgage interest, and that another third are housed by public authorities, thanks to government subsidy policies: a higher proportion of local authority housing than any other West European country, as well as most of those of the East where, contrary to popular imagination, a great deal of stress is put on individual and co-operative ownership and on self-build. (In countries like Hungary of course, where they are free from our ideological inhibitions in this area, there is a bigger proportion of owner-occupiers than in Britain. No doubt they discovered, as Messrs. Booker and Grey did in the *Observer* recently, that it would be cheaper to subsidise people into owner-occupation for new houses than into tenantry.)

Perhaps the real tragedy of our municipal housing achievement with its simple landlord-tenant relationship is that throughout history, this relationship has been an unhappy one. Anyone in this room who has been both a tenant and a landlord will know from experience that the perspective and perception of the same situation has been totally different according to which role he was playing. No landlord ever loves his tenant and no tenant ever loves his landlord, or at least neither ever trusts the other. That public enterprise in housing has simply taken over this relationship, instead of transforming it, has certainly been a tragedy. Fortunately it is one which could be given a happy ending. Cyberneticians have a notion which they call Ashby's Law of Requisite Variety, which states that "if stability is to be attained, the variety of the controlling system must be at least as great as the variety of the system to be controlled". Many years ago Lewis Waddilove discovered that there were fewer ways of getting a roof over your head in Britain than in almost any other country in Europe, and since then the number of ways, because of the continuing and inevitable decline of the private landlord, has been reduced virtually from three to two. This very crude and coarse-grained duopoly obviously offends against Ashby's Law of Requisite Variety, and one result is of course that if you don't fit into the right category, either as a supplicant to the Director of Housing or to the Building Society Manager, you just have nowhere to turn. There is already in Glasgow a category of people known as Corporation Cast-Offs.

In terms of Ashby's Law, the overdue experiments in alternative

forms of tenure are readily explicable. The squatter's movement for example is a completely legitimate and natural expression of the principle of requisite variety, filling part of the gap, since there are whole categories of people who will never be housed by the three (and increasingly two) modes of tenure. There are some valuable organisational lessons to be learned from the squatters, as Mike Kingham has already indicated in his contribution to the *Housing Review* last year.

I certainly regard the squatters movement as legitimate because of the number of empty dwellings in our cities. Kropotkin in his book *The Conquest of Bread* in the 1880s pointed out that "there are in all large towns enough empty houses and flats to lodge all the inhabitants of the slums". It remained true when the current squatters campaign began in 1968, and it remains true today. The fact that so much unoccupied property belongs not to wicked landlords but to councils themselves, with their ambition to provide a universal housing service, does not surprise me. For once again it seems to me obvious that the variety of controlling systems must be at least as varied as the system to be controlled, and municipal enterprise is a very blunt instrument, not because of the *Daily Express* caricature of the way it works, but because it operates within certain prescribed procedures and restraints, and on a scale that is not appropriate to the needs of the varied individual dwelling and dweller.

You could contradict this by referring to the current "Lash-Up" policy of Camden Council in London, a highly praiseworthy enterprise described in detail in the *Architects' Journal* for 23 April, 1975. But I would reply that a detailed proposal for a self-help version of the same thing was submitted, at his request, to the then chairman of Camden's Housing Committee on 14 October, 1973, by the Camden squatters. (Sue Hall and John Hopkins: *Selfhelp Rehabilitation Proposal*.) You might also refer to the press conference held at County Hall earlier this year, at which photographs of the damage done by squatters to council property were handed around. But I would reply that the squatters organisation could certainly put on an exhibition of the damage done by many London Councils to their own property by their own wrecking squads in order to keep squatters out. Such an exhibition would include videotape records and would include examples of Council wrecking intended to precede eventual demolition, having within months to be put right at great expense because between one council meeting and another, or between

the receipt of one Ministry Circular and another, a policy of rehabilitation instead of rebuilding had been decided upon. I have already mentioned my belief that psychological factors are important in housing. Turner has often expressed his conviction that the important thing about housing is not what it *is* but what it *does* in people's lives. How are we to explain that particular psychology of affronted outrage with which some of the professionals and politicians of the Housing Problems Industry face people's efforts to help themselves?

I am not even criticising our councillors and their officers when I say that the efforts of local authorities to provide a total housing service have been heroic but misguided. I am simply criticising the poverty of their political ideologies: the right and the left have both been wrong, in different way.

The Dutch architect N. J. Habraken brought out a book in 1961 called *Supports: An Alternative to Mass Housing*. It was eleven years before an English translation—or at least an authorised one—appeared, and the fact that Habraken's *solutions* are less convincing today than when he promulgated them (although the GLC may prove me wrong since they are conducting an experiment on his lines) has obscured the importance of the first part of his book which is a sustained criticism of what he calls MH: mass housing.

Habraken remarks that "It is one of the wonders of our existence that the satisfaction of some requirements demands a very positive, personal, almost creative action on our part. Even today no one would maintain that we can live merely by consumption, no matter how attractively or skilfully consumer goods are presented. But Mass Housing reduces the dwelling to a consumer article, and the dweller to a consumer. For only in this way can it be expected that the consumer waits until he is offered a completed product. It need not surprise us if this approach proves wrong because individual human action forms part of the housing brief."

It is time, Habraken declares, "to break the bonds of Mass Housing, and at least to inquire what the individual can contribute to the housing process", something which, as he says, is denied *a priori* by policies of mass housing which in consequence leave the matter entirely outside the discussion on housing policy. "Mass Housing pretends that the involvement of the individual and all that it implies simply ought not to exist. The provision of housing therefore cannot be called a process of man housing himself. Man no longer houses himself: he is housed."

Now you might observe that Habraken has a selective view of history, since, if they were poor, his ancestors and ours in, say, the 17th or 18th centuries, lived in shanties of mud and straw, not a trace of which remains. The vernacular architecture we have all learned to love, housed the superior artisan class rather than the poor of pre-industrial society, while, as we know, the industrial poor of the 19th century lived in grossly overcrowded insanitary slums. They had nothing to contribute to the housing process except rent. I don't know whether anyone has ever raised this question with Habraken. If it were raised, he would reply no doubt with the remark from page 24 of his book:

"In fact, Mass Housing in its original conception was never intended to house the entire community. It was merely an emergency measure which was seized upon when the normal process fell short. It was a means which was useful when a large number of people had to be housed in a short space of time. It was used when for various reasons the natural relationship had already been interrupted, and when certain groups of people for one reason or another could not house themselves—groups which thanks to this method were at any rate saved from homelessness. The paupers who were originally housed in this way were paupers just because they had no place in the normal pattern; because they had become isolated from it; and had to be housed by an external measure, by an artificial effort. Mass Housing has indeed been a blessing in recent times for countless people, and as an emergency measure has contributed to the fact that our civilisation has survived the industrial revolution. *But our problem began when this emergency measure from the turn of the century grew into housing for the entire community, and thus became the norm.*"

Actually, of course, it only became the norm for those ideologists in his country and in ours who confused society with the state and assumed that the activities of central and local government are to be equated with socialism. The *norm* has become owner-occupation, and this is not surprising because it confers so many benefits on its occupants in terms of freedom of manoeuvre, social status and financial gain. Just because it is the norm, no political party in our system of government is going to throw away votes by opposing it.

I have laid stress on the paucity of choice facing people who want to be housed. It is as though there has been an unconscious recognition by the politicians of both parties of the validity of Ashby's Law so that an alternative mode of tenure has grown

from being statistically totally insignificant to being relatively insignificant. I refer to housing societies and housing associations in their various forms. As though they recognised the insufficient range of tenures, successive governments in the last ten years have given varying degrees of financial encouragement to this hitherto neglected form of tenure, culminating in the very wide powers given to the Housing Corporation in the Housing Act of 1974, which in this respect is simply a rewrite of the previous government's Housing and Planning Bill. Both major parties have recognised, with different motivations, no doubt, that the Housing Association is potentially a more flexible mode of non-profit landlord than the local authority.

When the Housing Corporation first set up shop in 1964 it began making loans to both cost-rent and co-ownership schemes. At first the former predominated, but they were overtaken by co-ownership societies because of minor fiscal changes like the introduction of the option mortgage scheme. Their structure and advantages were described thus by Trevor MacMurray and Tony Shoults:

"Co-owners become members of a non-profit housing society, which is established to promote residential development. As members of the society co-owners collectively own the houses which they then occupy individually under a tenancy granted by the society. Co-owners do not become individual owners of their dwellings, but, by their rent payments to the society, they acquire an interest in the value of the property held by the society. And when a co-owner leaves (after a period) that interest is capitalised in a lump sum payment from the society. Thus, co-owners become shareholders in a society and receive capital returns based on the value of that shareholding interest."

In their view "co-ownership combines the benefits of owner-occupation and renting". It is in fact a very interesting variety of group tenure with a considerable potential importance. Unfortunately it is dead. The inflation of costs has priced it out of the market and the remaining co-ownership groups are in trouble. I am convinced that it just needs some financial concession, some minor amendment to the legislation to make co-ownership viable again, and I understand that the Housing Corporation has someone looking into this, while the DOE working party's recommendations on the subject is due in a month or two. It may be too that a more effective education of potential co-owners is also required. Many people joined without being given any grasp

of co-operative principles, and again, many were disappointed by the size of the pay-out when they left.

As to the ordinary kind of housing association, it is unhappily true that most of them perpetuate the same us-and-them relationship we are familiar with elsewhere. Harold Campbell has often remarked that they have even more reason than local authorities for taking seriously the need to introduce forms of tenant consultation in their affairs. Mr. Campbell is a veteran advocate of co-operative housing, and has had to wait for many years of apparently unheeded propaganda to evoke the current widespread interest in the potentialities of tenant co-operatives. Largely through his influence a very significant bit of enabling legislation—the very thing I was asking for in my book *Tenants Take Over*—was slipped in at the committee stage of the Housing Rents and Subsidies Act of 1974, which came into force on February 28 this year.

This, among its other provisions, enables local authorities to hand over the management or maintenance of estates to tenant co-operatives, or to lease them for terms of from 5 to 99 years to tenant co-operatives, without losing central government subsidies. I gather that one authority has already applied to the Secretary of State for approval for an experiment in the transfer of an existing estate to a co-operative of its tenants under these enabling powers.

At the same time Harold Campbell is chairman of the Working Party convened by the Minister whose report on co-operatives and on the future of co-ownership is expected soon. We just happen to have a Minister at the moment who understands what co-operative housing is about, and the people who have been lobbying for years have to make hay while the sun shines in case some government re-shuffle pushes Reg Freeson into some other job. His successor might be someone who takes the not uncommon view that all this talk about housing associations and tenant co-ops is beside the point because they believe that a universal municipal provision is the aim.

The actual pioneering developments on the ground owe nothing to governmental initiative. Indeed we could say that they have happened in spite of the bureaucracy of central and local government. They are pathetically few, but they are very significant as precedents.

The very newest of them once again owes much to Harold Campbell, and to fast action by the DOE, contradicting the

generalisation I have just made. In West Hampstead the Fairhazel Tenants' Association is about to take over 112 flats from two property companies as a tenants' co-operative, with a 30-year mortgage from the London Borough of Camden, which will have nomination rights for most vacancies. They will receive three kinds of grant from the Department of the Environment:

- (a) An Acquisition Grant to cover conveyancing and actual costs involved in the transaction.
- (b) A Housing Association Grant to cover the deficit between rents as fixed by the rent officer and capital expenditure on the premises which are in need of major structural repairs.
- (c) A Revenue Deficit Grant which is an annual grant for administration and management, conditional on rents remaining at the Rent Officer's figure.

Through Mr. Campbell's good offices there was only a month between the tenants' first approach and the DOE's confirmation that it was willing to support a co-op. Now the journal *Time Out* commented that the fact that these flats were being taken out of the private rented sector would mean that the young and mobile would no longer be eligible to rent flats there because the waiting list system implied large families first, everyone else last. Mr. Campbell replied, "There is no reason why young single people should not form a co-op in the same way, but on a smaller scale. Mortgages are also available from the Housing Corporation, which does not necessarily claim the same nomination rights as councils. We are determined to see a much wider variety of choice than at present exists in housing."

The second example I want to mention of a tenants' co-op is just this: a purpose-built tenants' co-op for the young and mobile. This is the Sanford Co-operative Dwellings at Deptford in South London, promoted by the Society for Co-operative Dwellings. It took John Hands not a month, but six years of lobbying and negotiation to get this one built. It made a number of precedents, and was the first communal housing scheme to qualify for government subsidy.

It consists of 14 self-contained ten-person houses for single people and 6 one-bedroom flats. Each commune has ten bed-sitting rooms (with hand-basins), 2 bathrooms, 3 WCs and "farmhouse kitchen". All are furnished, carpeted and centrally heated. Each of the 146 tenants has one £25 share and one vote in the co-operative society, run on Rochdale principles. When he leaves he sells this share back to the society, who pass it on to the incoming

member at the same price. It is thus what we call a "par-value" co-op rather than a "market-value" one.

Each member pays £7 a week (or did when the dwellings opened last October: inflation has needless to say put the figure up) and this sum covered mortgage repayments, running costs, including repairs and maintenance, central heating, electricity, rates and furniture replacements. Half the £377,350 capital loan was borrowed from the Housing Corporation and half from Commercial Union Insurance, both repayable over 40 years. The option mortgage subsidy brings the interest rate to a current level of 7.4%. The 1-acre site was leased for 75 years for £40,000 from the London Borough of Lewisham. Furnishings were provided by the ILEA in return for 35% nomination rights.

John Hands, the Director of SCD, explained to me something of the uphill struggle to break through the red tape of our housing legislation to get acceptance for the idea of tenant co-operative ownership and of communal housing for the young and mobile. There are a million full-time students in Britain, and, according to him, 5 million people in the 18-24 age range, but because housing policy is geared solely to the family, young single adults are in a desperate plight. (This of course explains the historical necessity of the squatters' movement.) He claimed that the construction cost of £2,100 per person in the communal houses was less than half the conventional cost, either in hostels or one-person flats, and that any new building scheme of comparable standard in Greater London would cost tenants at least 50 per cent more than a co-operative scheme. Garth Carswell and Colin Johnson, members of the Sanford Co-op, stressed other advantages. They want, with help from SCD, to cut annual costs through members themselves undertaking management and maintenance. By doing so they could reduce running costs by as much as £5,000 below the budget figure. The general meeting would decide what to do with the surplus—improvement of amenities and/or a dividend to members. "Only in a co-op do members bear the financial responsibility for the consequences of their own management."

Yet another style of group tenure is the Holloway Tenants Co-operative which will be described to you by Tricia Duhane and is associated with Circle 33 Housing Trust, though it has reached the stage where the members want to register as a housing association themselves. This grew out of the local Housing Rights Project and is of particular interest as it brings together people in housing need, before they are rehoused. In Liverpool

there is the Granby Housing Co-operative which grew out of the Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project, and is a co-operative consisting of people already living in the district who banded together to take over the existing houses. There are now three more tenant co-operatives in Liverpool, and the four of them are served by a secondary co-op, Neighbourhood Housing Services.

In the East End of London, there is an interesting illegal co-op, Sumner House, consisting of people (young local married couples) who seized an old walk-up block of flats which was being decanted by the Borough for a total rehabilitation. The members claim that they could do the rehabilitation themselves in a way more suited to their own needs, and that this would be much cheaper and quicker than the council's rehabilitation. This is in a borough where about 89% of housing belongs to public authorities and where the borough itself is in such despair about its housing list that it runs a ballot to see which eligible families will be lucky. It is no secret that Mr. Freeson has asked the council to give the scheme favourable consideration, but unfortunately relations between the council and the Sumner House co-op are getting worse.

Thus during the past twelve months we have had a crescendo of interest in alternative forms of group tenure, at all levels in the housing world. The Association of London Housing Estates has issued a document which declares that:

"The Association takes the view that the time is ripe for legislation which will make it mandatory upon local authorities to produce schemes which will enable council tenants to take over responsibility for the management of the estates where they live . . . We welcome the implication of a social contract which will put an end to the second class citizen role which tenants have played by virtue of being recipients without responsibility. In the ALHE document *An Approach to Rents* we pointed out that there is a need to move from consultative to management roles and that legislation should recognise the importance of tenants being given a firm programme of participation leading to the stage where they will achieve *total control on the estates where they live*."

Similarly a growing number of members of housing committees and people in management are seeing the obvious advantages, in view of the inflation of maintenance and management costs, of transferring responsibilities to tenants. But I have heard the view very firmly expressed by officers of tenants' associations that moves to shift onto tenants responsibilities that are traditionally those of the

landlord should be firmly resisted unless they show a tangible financial advantage to tenants, whose associations frequently declare that they *are* already exercising management functions by default. I am not certain that a par value co-operative structure will meet this situation even though it is very appropriate to other potential situations for group tenure. So I very much hope that the Working Party will devise some viable formula for a market-value or co-ownership form of transfer for existing estates, without the obvious disadvantages.

In the nature of things it is likely that experiments will be made at the two ends of the municipal third of the housing market—in very "good" estates or in very "bad" ones. In the latter category there do exist estates where the social and physical environment have deteriorated so far that whole groups of houses are untenanted and vandalised, and where the only apparent option left to the local authority is demolition. A creeping demoralisation spreads like an epidemic through the whole estate. It seems to me that in these circumstances, a local authority should be encouraged to offer the houses on very favourable terms to whoever will come together in a co-operative to occupy and rehabilitate them, with grants for this purpose. (If the District Valuer would put a realistic valuation on uninhabitable—and consequently valueless—houses this should be possible.)

It is perfectly true that this idea would only attract adventurous and competent families, but it should be treated and publicised as an adventure, and I am sure that, if the terms offered were right, people would be queueing up to take part. The social effect of such an experiment would be enormous, and I would especially hope that just as social deterioration spreads like a sore on such estates, so the boost to morale would spread too.

Two things worry me about this whole field. One is our dependency on obscure clauses in incomprehensible legislation to make schemes financially viable, without regard to their actual merits. We have seen the rise and fall of co-ownership schemes in less than a decade, and we don't want to see the same thing again. This total dependence on the Treasury or on legislative whims and windfalls is of course the result of our tangled web of financial provision for housing which is totally out of step with real costs, and I for one can see no solution in the short term. The second thing that worries me is that tenant co-operatives are going to be this year's or next year's fashion, to be dropped when something goes wrong. There *will* be unsuccessful experi-

ments—the fruits of our inexperience and our total neglect of this form of tenure in the past, which is in turn the result of our neglect of the principle of requisite variety and of dweller control.

Now anyone who has been in the Housing Problems Industry for quite a while has seen some dramatic changes in the conventional wisdom. They will remember the years of comprehensive redevelopment, the crude philosophy of “raze and rise” and they will have seen the social disasters that have resulted. Many of our “General Improvement Areas” are precisely the places where Planner’s Blight as we are obliged to call it has *induced* the run-down of an area and has prevented the normal processes of gradual renewal. A change of heart, or a cutting-off of the source of cash, has turned us all into conservationists, rehabilitationists, believers in our grandparents’ philosophy of make and mend. The word has come down from the top, and we are like the family who all slept in one bed. When Father turns, we all turn.

Having given my word of praise to the Minister, let me now attack him. For unfortunately, Father is cutting back on the pocket money. The London Boroughs in particular, are bitter about the way in which, after Mr. Crosland has been pressing upon them the claims of rehabilitation, Mr. Freeson has reduced the sum of money they were going to get to do it with. No doubt the Treasury is behind it all, but it certainly affects their plans for doing up all those houses they have been buying up on the open market (and leaving empty for months) as well as their plans for the modernisation of older council estates.

Now compare those inter-war estates, going downhill very rapidly in many towns, with the speculative builder’s housing of the same period and the same initial cost, and probably inferior constructional standards. It’s flourishing as the adverts in estate agents’ windows will tell you, and has been improved over the years, to suit the pocket and the inclinations of the occupants—with central heating, roof extensions, picture windows, fancy porches, two tone bathrooms and so on. The difference is dweller control.

Mr. Freeson, in an interview published in a recent issue of *Building Design*, makes a spirited defence of the cuts he is imposing on local authority spending in the field of rehabilitation. He says that, stimulated by the 1971 Act, local authorities all over the country have been spending about £300 m. a year of a total publicly financed improvement expenditure of £400 m. “We

estimate that about 75 per cent of that £300 m. has gone on inter-war purpose-built estates, the vast majority of which are in good condition.” And he says, “One local authority we are dealing with was planning to rehabilitate 1,200-odd dwellings. They had already made a return to us showing that they had 1,100 substandard properties in their ownership. In the 1,200 that they were going to rehabilitate, however, only 200 were substandard, by their own returns. The other 1,100 all had the basic amenities.”

The Minister’s remark illustrates several things. For one thing it indicates that with the best will in the world, councils find it very hard to work on the scale of the individual dwelling rather than statistically. Compare it with the way in which Mr. Hackney works in Macclesfield, or Project Assist works in Govan, or Camden’s “Lash-Up” policy works in London. And for another thing it illustrates the crudity of the standards by which we judge housing, and have to, if we are thinking quantitatively, instead of in terms of people’s own perceptions of their housing situation.

I am considerably more worried than the Minister, and I expect you are too, about the state of our inter-war estates. Mr. David Kirby, in his study of such estates, which are a quarter of the whole municipal housing stock, remarked that:

“It has been established that in many cases the inter-war council dwelling no longer provides an adequate standard of accommodation, and in many cases maintenance work is being neglected and the inter-war environment is falling into a state of physical decay . . . Residential decay is clearly linked with the esteem in which the property is held by both the tenant *and* the landlord, and it would seem that in part this is related, directly or indirectly, to the standard of accommodation which the dwelling affords. Although it was intended that most inter-war council dwellings should provide socially adequate accommodation for at least 60 years, it can be seen that they now afford a standard of accommodation which is below that officially deemed acceptable. Clearly dwellings, like most consumer durables, are subject to the process of obsolescence, and it is apparent that ‘the neglect of maintenance that leads to decay is a reflection of lowered esteem for an obsolescing article.’”

In this situation I am sure that councils who have never taken seriously the idea of tenant co-ops will rapidly become converted to the idea, when they realise that it is only dweller control that will give a new lease of life to these estates. The first essential is a campaign of education and explanation to change the way in

which the organisation of housing is perceived, to change our assumptions about housing. By this I don't mean a campaign to brainwash tenants into accepting a change of status. Councillors and management, the whole expensive administrative structure have to learn to undertake a quite new function, so that what we have made tortuous and difficult becomes simple and natural.